



# The Story of Little Black Horse

BY YUAN CHING



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Little Black Horse*

*By*

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## 1. Abandoned!

“Little Black Horse” was the nickname of a boy.

Now, of course he is already grown up. If you go to visit his farm, you will probably see him heading a tractor team, driving a new type of tractor and turning the earth on the broad fields; perhaps you will find him holding a conference with the director of the farm, making plans and arguing on some problems, or maybe you will find him on the playground taking part in a hotly-contested basketball match. In other words, he is already grown up now and is an active and energetic builder of socialism. People may call him Comrade Ma Chang-sheng or Captain Ma; very rarely is he ever called “Little Black Horse.” But at the time of liberation, he was really a little black horse, a poor child of the streets — in reality, a little beggar. He had a master who taught him the technique of his trade; he had sworn brothers; and he was a master of many tricks to help him beg and solicit money.

It was 1950, the year after the liberation of the whole country. One autumn morning, Little Black Horse and his two sworn brothers were loitering on a main street in Tientsin, turning their heads to the right and left of them and looking around as they walked along the pavement. Their appearance was pitiful, all three of them being in rags and barefooted. What a sight they were with their patched and ragged clothing! The oldest of the boys was nicknamed Big-eyed Monkey. He looked somewhat like a monkey with a little flat nose and hollow sunken eyes, also his movements and actions were quick like those of a monkey. He elbowed Little Black Horse and winked at him, saying in a low voice, "It's pretty hard these days. We must be a bit careful. If you see a man with a belt around his waist, you'd better hide yourself and always be prepared to run





away in case anyone tries to catch you.”

Little Black Horse snorted, “Don’t you worry. I am all right. They’ll never catch me!” He pulled his cap down a little and adjusted the straw cord around his waist, blew his running nose and spoke with great confidence.

The other child, Niu Niu, who came from the country, asked, “Brother Monkey, why do they want to catch us? We don’t bother anybody. There’s no harm in letting us alone.”

“What a fool you are! You don’t know anything,” replied Big-eyed Monkey. “Didn’t our master say that they would send us to the barracks once they have rounded us up? They’ll make soldiers out of us and make us fight for them. I was a messenger boy in a Kuomintang military camp once. Oh! It’s hell! I have suffered enough. I would rather die than go back there.”

“Nobody wants to go,” the other two boys answered at the same time.

When they came to a crossroad, Big-eyed Monkey made a signal to Little Black Horse with his mouth while he and Niu Niu turned to the east. Little Black Horse also made a signal to them with his eyes, which meant, “See you again in the evening!” Then he headed westward.

Little Black Horse came to a grocery shop and stood at the door. He looked around and seeing no

policeman, he took out his bamboo pieces\* and began to ply his street corner trade. Very eloquently, he began to sing, "As my bamboo pieces strike against each other, I come to salute the manager and at the same time to ask him for something. . . ."

With a frown, the manager of the shop came out and waved with his hand, "Go away, you little beggar. Say, don't you know, it's liberation now!"

Paying no attention to what he said, Little Black Horse went on with his usual routine.

"Hey! Why are you scolding me? I'm only asking you to give me a little money. It needn't be much. You can certainly spare me a little. If you want to be thrifty and save money, you have to do it in a big way — so that you can buy thousands of mou of land. If you want to calculate, you must do that in a big way, too — so that you'll have hundreds of thousands of dollars. I also calculated, but only in a small way. Now I have become a beggar! A man has his descendants, a grass its roots. A man has

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\* Small pieces made of bamboo about 3 inches long and 2 inches wide put together loosely by threading them on a string. They are swung and clicked together in various rhythms, the manipulator singing or saying his composed monologue to the amusement of his listeners. In the old days, this was one of the commonest ways in which the loafers tried to make a living at the street corners.





his old age protected by his descendants; the grass will grow up again next spring from its root. If a man doesn't have descendants, who will visit his grave during the tomb-sweeping festival after his death?"

At last, annoyed by the nuisance the boy created, the manager threw some small change at him with a curse and then went inside the shop.

Little Black Horse picked up the money and moved along after fixing his belt a bit. As he lifted his head, he found himself in front of a shop which sold coffins. Immediately he started his singing again to the accompaniment of the rhythm he made with his bamboo pieces:

"As I play the bamboo pieces and walk along, I come to a coffin shop. High is the building of the coffin shop; the coffins are piled up to the middle of the wall. . . ."

Bang! Little Black Horse was hit on his head when he was in the middle of his well-memorized recitation. When he lifted his hands to protect his head, he received another bang on his hand. As he looked up, he saw that a big fat man, evidently the manager, was going to give him a third knock on the head with the metal end of his long pipe. The manager started to curse him: "You son of a gun. You're looking for trouble! If you don't run off, I'll give you another. . . ." As he said this, he

gave Little Black Horse a push, trying to send him away, but the boy refused to move. He went on reciting.

“Hey, if you beat me, I’ll refuse to go. I will keep on begging until you treat me to supper. Then you’ll have to treat me to eggs, noodles, onions and meat dumplings. . . . We’ll see who will win in the end!”

A stalemate ensued since neither one was willing to give way. The manager tried hard to push Little Black Horse away and the latter tried with all his might to stick to the door. Just at this moment, Little Black Horse felt a big hand fall upon his shoulders. He turned and saw it was a man wearing a belt around his waist, one of the people’s policemen.

“Boy, don’t make trouble here. Follow me!” the policeman said to him in a kindly voice.

“Where to?” Little Black Horse asked with a wink at the policeman.

“The Children’s Home,” the policeman answered him again kindly. “The People’s Government has prepared a good place for you lads where you will have work to do, food to eat and a place to sleep. It’s much better than loafing around the streets. Come on. Let’s go!”

Little Black Horse looked at the club in the

policeman's hand, sniffed and fixed his belt a bit in a very nonchalant way.

"All right, let's go!"

Noticing that the boy was prompt in answering him, the policeman was glad and together they started off for the Children's Home. On their way, they had to go along a main street. When they came to a cinema house, it just happened to be the end of a matinée and the crowds were pouring out on to the street. Little Black Horse saw that the crowds offered him good means of escape and he started to run off, the policeman hot in pursuit.

He really was a little black horse. Small and short, he elbowed his way in and out of the crowd and in a short time disappeared among the people.

Little Black Horse spent the whole day on the streets, wandering from one place to another, hungry, cold and weary.

"What shall I do?" The thought of his master brought fear to his heart. "I have earned very little money today," Little Black Horse said to himself as he recalled what kind of man his master was. "I'll likely get three slaps in the face or probably a good beating."

The surname of Little Black Horse's master was Li, but everyone used his nickname of Li San Ma Tse (San means three because he was the third son in the family; Ma Tse means pockmarked face) or

Smallpox Li. He was the ringleader of a group of beggars. When he demanded money from a shop, if the shop refused to comply with his demand, he would commit a nuisance at the door or even pretend to lie dead at the entrance. He would resort to all kinds of tricks so that the shop owner would find it better to send him away by giving him some money. This was the way he made a living. Therefore, the shop owners were afraid of him. After he took in several homeless children and made them his apprentices by teaching them some of the techniques of his trade, he seldom went out himself. They all lived in a dilapidated house which belonged to a small restaurant. Their room was built in a narrow space under the stairway. The roof was sloping and the room was low and small. The master himself slept on a wooden bed. He let the children sleep on the ground crowded together on one old worn-out mattress. The ground was covered with straw; it was dirty and had a bad odour. It was really like a kennel. Two children shared a ragged cotton-padded coat as a quilt at night. They ate the leftovers from the tables in the Moslem restaurant next door, an arrangement made by their master with the management. The children were sent out daily to beg or to steal things. Whatever they got, they were forced to turn over to Smallpox Li, who told



them that this was right because he provided them with everything. Every winter, Smallpox Li regularly picked out the smallest boy, usually Sun Hsiao-pao or Little Black Horse to whom he gave a drink of kaoliang wine. Then he told the boy to lie on the snow in one of the main streets almost naked. With tears all over his face and shivering on the pavement, the child certainly presented a pitiful sight to the passers-by, some of whom were greatly moved and dropped some money into his hand, or even brought him some old clothing. The child was frozen and nearly dead when the "show" was over. Everything he got on the street, he turned over to the master. For any attempts he made to deceive the master in the collection of money or for concealing a portion of the things the passers-by gave him, he would get a good beating. This was only one of the wicked things Smallpox Li used to do.

The moon was high up in the sky, which indicated to Little Black Horse that it was about nine o'clock. Wandering on the streets for a whole day, Little Black Horse now had to go back to the small room which was supposed to be his home. When he arrived, the thing that surprised him was the fact that most of the other children were not back yet. Big-eyed Monkey and Niu Niu were among those who had not returned. Those who were

there already were sound asleep. The master was sitting on his bed in his usual manner with a bottle of strong liquor. Under the light of an oil lamp, the master's face looked very red with the pock-marks showing clearly. To Little Black Horse's great surprise his master was especially kind and polite this evening. He did not resort to beating, nor did he swear at the boy. He didn't even use his favourite expressions, such as "you son-of-a-bitch," "damn you," etc., but instead, he said in a low voice, "Your meal is in the barrel. Go on, eat now!"

Like a hungry wolf, Little Black Horse literally swallowed the meal in one bite although it was as cold as ice. As he was eating, the master said to him in an intimate way.

"Little Black Horse, there are no good prospects for our work in the future. Let's do some business together."

Little Black Horse could not make out what his master really meant. Before he tried to make a reply, his master stood up. He was like a bear standing on its hind legs, big and towering, his head nearly touching the ceiling. He suddenly demanded:

"Little Black Horse, take out the money you have saved and let's do our business together."

Little Black Horse dared not look at his master's

face, but he could tell how he looked from the way he spoke. He said in his heart, "What a devil he is! How can he possibly know about that big banknote which I picked up on the street and hid inside the patch on my coat?"

Little Black Horse did not know the answer to his own question, but he automatically put his two little hands over the patch in front of his chest.

"You little fool," Smallpox Li said with a forced smile, "you are a partner in the business now. When the time comes, you shall also have a share of the profit."

Of course, Master Li had no difficulty in taking the money away from Little Black Horse.

As a rule, Little Black Horse shared a cotton-padded coat with Niu Niu. That night, Niu Niu did not come back, and therefore he had the privilege of using the coat all to himself. But the master took away the coat after a while and he was told to share one with another boy, Erh Hsiao-tse. Erh Hsiao-tse was a big boy who found the coat not big enough even for himself. Little Black Horse struggled hard to get under a corner of it as he lay down to sleep. He thought to himself, "Big-eyed Monkey and Niu Niu have not come back yet. Is it possible that they have been rounded up and taken away to be soldiers . . . ?"

Not long after he lay down on the straw mat-

dress, he fell asleep. He did not have much time to think any more.

To Little Black Horse, this sleep was both sound and sweet. He did not wake up till long after daybreak the next morning when Erh Hsiao-tse called out loudly, waking him up. Before he was completely awakened, he heard Erh Hsiao-tse weeping as he said: "You damn fools. You still go on sleeping. The master has run away. He has run away with my pocket watch. . . ."

Sure enough, all that was left on the master's bed was two wooden boards and nothing more.

## 2. A New Home

Little Black Horse wandered on the streets the next morning with an empty stomach. The rumbling sounds that kept coming from it reminded him that he was terribly hungry.

As he walked along the street, all kinds of delicious smells kept wafting past his nose from the food-stalls — baked sesame bread, stewed sweet potatoes, meat dumplings, and what not. Little Black Horse was angry. He blew his running nose

and tightened his belt, murmuring to himself, "I'd better not look at these things."

But he was automatically attracted to a food-stall selling sweet potatoes, which, as they were cooking, sent up clouds of steam into the air as well as a sweet odour. He thought to himself, "What fine soft sweet potatoes! They are as red as dates!" As he stood there, he lifted his head and saw a man wearing a belt around his waist coming along the street. With him were some other poor children. Needless to say, he thought the man was coming to catch him. So Little Black Horse started to take to his heels, hearing someone calling after him, "Little Black Horse. Don't run away, Little Black Horse. You don't have to run away!"

Little Black Horse stopped and as he turned his head was surprised to see Niu Niu running after him.

"Niu Niu, what's it all about?" He was anxious to find out.

Niu Niu did not answer him immediately, but he nodded to the man wearing a belt around his waist, who was a soldier of the People's Liberation Army, and said something like this:

"Uncle, you'd better go along first. I will come along in a few minutes."

With a brown tanned face, and a pleasant smile, the "uncle" took some children along with him,

and they were all smiling as they walked away. Little Black Horse noticed, then, that the soldier was a cripple, and that he limped as he walked along the pavement.

Strange! How did Niu Niu come to have such a relative? How was it that Niu Niu had never mentioned anything about this crippled man? But before Little Black Horse could speak, Niu Niu asked him first, "Little Black Horse, are you hungry? Here is a piece of cake."

He handed over to Little Black Horse a big piece of rice-cake. Little Black Horse was really very hungry. Not waiting to stand on ceremony nor making any false pretence and refusing the offer, he took the cake and put it straight into his mouth. The two boys talked as they walked along on the pavement together.

"Niu Niu, you and Big-eyed Monkey didn't come back last night. What happened?"

"Big-eyed Monkey was putting his hand into somebody's pocket and he was caught and arrested. I followed him to the Home for the Homeless."

"Oh, you mean that they are going to put you into the army?"

"No, don't talk nonsense! We are too small to join the People's Liberation Army. Even if you wanted to, you wouldn't pass the physical examination."

“Is the ‘Home’ good?”

“You ask me if it’s good. Well, did you see those lads with me a minute ago? They all came with me. You’d better come along too, hadn’t you?”

Little Black Horse hesitated a moment, thinking what to say in reply. “All right. I’ll go there for a try. If it doesn’t suit me, I can run away.”

The two boys went along and soon arrived at the “Home.”

Formerly the place had been a pawnshop, but at the time of liberation, the manager had run away. The premises consisted of several courtyards with many rooms, all of which were full of homeless and jobless people, men and women, young and old. When Niu Niu went in with Little Black Horse, one courtyard was full of teen-agers. The crippled soldier Little Black Horse had



seen on the street, sat at a table reading a book. With a smile, he nodded to the boys and said:

"Come here. Let's put your name down. What is your name?"

Little Black Horse felt very uneasy as he stood there with his two bare feet. He did not know where to put them. He was wondering to himself why it was necessary to have his name put down. Without thinking, he replied, "I have no name."

"What! You don't know your surname?"

"Ma is my surname."

Niu Niu interrupted by saying, "His nickname is Little Black Horse. Don't you see he is small and black, just like a little black horse?"

The children who stood around all laughed. Little Black Horse winked at them and raised one arm to wipe his nose on his sleeve.

The crippled soldier went on to ask:

"What did your mother call you when you were just a kid?"

As Little Black Horse was not sure he was going to like the Home, he was not willing to tell them his real name, which was Ma Chang-sheng. He saw a bottle of ink on the table so he just said, "I am called Ma Ping-erh."\*

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\* The Chinese characters for the word "bottle" are pronounced *ping erh*.



"How old are you?"

"Fifteen."

"What's your father's occupation?"

"He was a pedicab driver. He died long ago."

"Your mother?"

"I have no mother."

Niu Niu broke in again, "What? You do have a mother."

Little Black Horse was angered by Niu Niu's statement. He rushed up to Niu Niu and started a quarrel with him. "You are talking nonsense. Where do I have a mother? All right, you find my mother for me."

"Sure, your mother is still living, isn't she?" Niu Niu said.

"Shut up, or I'll beat you." Little Black Horse threatened as he clenched his fists, his face getting very red. Tears moistened his eyes and he was about to cry.

The crippled soldier, whose name was Liu Teh-shan, felt a little surprised, "What was all this about? This boy. . . ."

Some thoughts passed through his mind as he put down in the register "mother" with a question mark after it. Then he said:

"Well, well! Don't quarrel. Later on, you will all go to school and you'll no longer be boys without a home. Come on, let's give you a haircut and a bath."

Each boy was given a towel and a cake of soap. Liu Teh-shan walked first, followed by the youngsters. They came out of the Home and walked over to a bathhouse across the street. When they entered, it was full of children. Little Black Horse was glad to find that Big-eyed Monkey was also there. Monkey's head was clean shaven and shining and Little Black Horse hardly recognized him. Little Black Horse smiled, saying:

"Big-eyed Monkey, look at your bald head. It shines like an electric light bulb."

"Oh! Don't you laugh at me. When you have yours shaved, it will look even worse than mine." Then Big-eyed Monkey broke into a loud laugh and the other children joined him.

It was a long time since Little Black Horse had had his last haircut. His hair stood up on his head like a crop of weeds. When Liu Teh-shan was ready with the razor, Little Black Horse put his two hands over his head, refusing to have his hair cut.

"After a haircut, you'll look clean and feel comfortable. Why don't you want a haircut?" Liu Teh-shan asked.

"It hurts!"

"What a fool you are!" Niu Niu cried out. "If he doesn't want a haircut, I want one!"

Seeing that the others fought for the chance of

getting a haircut, Little Black Horse took his hands down from his head. Liu Teh-shan wetted his hair and poured some soap over it, making a white foam all over his head. The razor ran over it and in a few minutes mowed off all his hair. Big-eyed Monkey came to see him again and, with a tap on his bald head, said:

“Three taps on the bald head will protect it from getting scars; three taps on the bald head will prevent it from getting fleas and rash.”

Little Black Horse also wanted to give Big-eyed Monkey three taps on his head, but the latter would not let him. They started to chase each other around the room.

Liu Teh-shan who was cutting hair for Niu Niu cried out:

“Boys! Those of you who have already had a haircut better go to the bathroom. There you can have a shower.”

As soon as Big-eyed Monkey heard this, he was the first to run over to the bathroom with a towel. The other children rushed after him.

It was a steam bath with a big pool in which stood many children. On the edge of the pool sat a few boys enjoying the novelty of “rain from the jug” as they named the shower. Big-eyed Monkey and Little Black Horse, who were both naked now, also crowded themselves under the raining jug.

Enthusiastically, Little Black Horse cried out:

"It's raining. Let's play in the rain!"

After a haircut and shower, Liu Teh-shan issued clothes to the children. These clothes were army supplies captured from the enemy's warehouses at the time of liberation. They were of all colours. Each boy was issued two suits with shoes. In a new suit, each boy's appearance changed and they looked handsome and smart. Their food consisted of steamed millet bread with stewed cabbage and carrots. At night, two boys shared one big blanket. When they slept on a bed, they felt both happy and comfortable. Niu Niu said:

"Not bad! Wasn't I right? I told you so. Tomorrow someone is coming to teach us to sing and also to do the *yangko* dance."

Little Black Horse wore a student's cotton jacket and a pair of sports trousers with a leather belt around the waist. Although the coat was a little too big for him and the trousers too long, they were still in good condition. They ate another meal after the bath which they enjoyed greatly. When he lay on the soft bed, Little Black Horse found life both enjoyable and merry. Before he closed his eyes and fell asleep, he murmured to himself:

"Hey! So far, this is not bad at all. Who knows what the future will hold for us?"

Little Black Horse used to have a habit of sniffing, but now it seemed that his nose didn't get so dirty any more.

With a cigarette butt in his mouth, Big-eyed Monkey who slept next to him said in reply, "Don't you worry!" as he waved his hand. "It doesn't matter a bit to me. We'll just see how it turns out. If it doesn't suit us, we have two legs, haven't we?"

### 3. Disappointed

Time passed quickly in the Home. Every day someone came to teach them to sing. The song they were taught to sing was somewhat like this: "This flower is very beautiful. Let us give it to a hero or to a model worker. Men and women, old and young, we all work for the reconstruction of our motherland to turn it into a wonderful garden. Under the leadership of the Communist Party we work very hard. From now on we will not rely on anybody else but we will provide ourselves with food and clothing by the work of our two hands."

After the singing, they all joined in a *yangko*

dance and then attended a class to learn "Why is it good to work?" Discussion followed but during the discussion very few spoke. Only in the *yangko* dance did they have a full attendance and the courtyard was filled with youngsters who laughed, joked, shouted, and had plenty of fun.

Very soon, all the "Homes for the Homeless" in Tientsin were filled with wandering loafers who were grouped according to age and sex. Some of the old people who could no longer work were sent to the "Homes for the Aged"; the younger children were sent to nurseries. Able-bodied men were grouped into production teams. Little Black Horse and the boys over 14 were in the Youth Group, ready to go to Lutai State Farm, north of Tientsin, to participate in agricultural production. Their captain was the crippled demobilized soldier, Uncle Liu Teh-shan. The deputy captain was another demobilized soldier, Kao Pao-yuan. The youngsters had a rousing send-off on the day they left Tientsin. Their meal consisted of steamed bread and pork. The group was presented with a big banner on which there was an inscription which said, "Start a new life through labour." Civic bodies and organizations in Tientsin sent them refreshments, peanuts, water-melon seeds and sweets. Every boy was in high spirits and when they lined up, they carried on their backs

and shoulders spades, baskets, carrying poles, and spikes. They proceeded to the station in a long column through the streets, beating gongs and drums. With a big red flag at the head, they sang loudly and happily as the column moved to the railway station. This really caused a sensation in the streets where stallkeepers and shopkeepers came out to see them. They applauded as the once troublesome beggars marched past them. They said, "Thank god for getting rid of these boys. Hereafter, we can rest in peace." "In this new society, everyone joins some kind of productive labour. Really this is a good thing the People's Government has done." "It is not an easy job to round up these little rascals and reform them!"

The railway station used to be one of the regular haunts of Little Black Horse. There was a time when he went to the station every night and slept on one of the long benches. He was always chased off by a policeman but as soon as the policeman left, he would go back and sleep there again. But he had never been on a train. He, as well as the other boys, was anxious to board the train and have a ride.

"How does it feel to ride in a train?" he asked Niu Niu and Erh Hsiao-tse. Niu Niu was from the country. When he went to Tientsin, he had covered the distance on foot. Erh Hsiao-tse was born

and brought up in Tientsin, never having been out of the city. Of course, he had never had a chance to ride in a train. Only Big-eyed Monkey who had been a messenger boy in the Kuomintang army had once had such an experience. This gave him a good opportunity to show off.

"Oh! You boys can't guess how fast the train goes. It really flies. But you don't feel the train flying. You just see the trees, the houses, and the telephone poles — they fly past you so fast!"

"If the train doesn't have any wings, how can it fly?" Little Black Horse asked incredulously.

"Don't be a fool! You have never been on a train, so you wouldn't know," Big-eyed Monkey shouted back at him.

The train came at last. White smoke was seen in the distance and a noise like thunder was heard. In a moment it was in the station. As it moved the earth shook and they became dizzy from watching it pass. With a rush, the boys climbed on the train and everyone fought for a seat near the window.

In a minute, a girl's voice was heard from the loudspeaker: "Passengers will please note this train is now leaving for Shenyang. It is going to start in one minute. Friends coming to see passengers off are requested to alight immediately. Friends coming to see passengers off are requested to alight immediately."



A bell rang in the station. The locomotive let off a queer scream and the train started to move. A popular march was played over the loudspeaker as the train moved off from the platform.

The boys watched all this with great interest. After the train was out of the urban area it picked up speed and dashed through the countryside. Big-eyed Monkey, who occupied one of the seats beside a window, said with a satisfied air; "Look here! Little Black Horse, look here. Wasn't I right? Do you see how everything is flying past us?"

"Strange! Those things near us are flying, but those villages beyond the fields don't seem to be moving."

"Look, there is a big junk. The boatman's wife is there combing her hair," Niu Niu cried out loudly.

Throughout the journey laughter and jokes filled the carriage occupied by the youngsters, as if it were a New Year holiday.

But their happiness and laughter seemed to come to an end when they got off the train at Lutai. Some horse-drawn carts carried their baggage and the boys carried the implements. As they walked on they saw nothing but wilderness. The further they walked the more desolate it became. What place was this they had come to? Barren wilderness was all they saw in one desolate field

after another. Weeds grew everywhere. There was not a single village, nor did they meet anyone on the road. On the way, they crossed one bridge after another; some of the bridges were broken and they had to cross the little streams barefooted. At last, they came to a big enclosure, fenced off by a ditch, which they crossed before they entered.

Deputy Captain Kao was leading the way. Captain Liu was carrying the spade for Sun Hsiao-pao, who was bringing up the rear. He was in high spirits, as if he were returning to his own home town. Very enthusiastically he cried out:

"Boys, this is our destination. This is the Lutai State Farm, the first big farm in North China. Here we are going to grow rice — plenty of rice . . . on large tracts of land. . . ."

"Rice . . . I know rice well!" Niu Niu cried out enthusiastically, still carrying the spade on his shoulder. "Back in my home, my father used to work in a rice field for the landlord "Li the Good Man."

"What? Li the Good Man? How could a landlord be a good man? Boys, this is a state farm." Then Captain Liu went on to explain. "A state farm is managed by the government," he said, "where everyone works for socialism and for himself. This is different from the old days. We are going to grow rice, wheat, cotton and. . . ."





"But we don't know how to do it!" Erh Hsiao-tse shouted out bluntly.

Little Black Horse fixed his belt a little, making a grimace. He asked:

"Then will we have white rice and white bread to eat?"

With a cigarette end in his mouth, Big-eyed Monkey stretched out his hands and gave Little Black Horse a pinch. "This is what you will get," he replied, showing Little Black Horse his fist.

"Boys, don't worry because you have never done this before. We must all learn," Captain Liu said to them in a kindly way. "How many of us can say we were born a peasant and know how to till the fields. But there is a trained staff here. Some technicians will be sent here . . . tractor operators, agricultural specialists will all come. They will train us to be agricultural workers."

But when the boys went inside, they found it was absolutely desolate; they could not even see a single person. How could this be called a farm?

Inside the enclosure there were many dilapidated old houses, covered with debris everywhere. Weeds had grown very high. Among the weeds there were toads which hopped away as the children went near them.

They heard a noise somewhere.

As they walked on, they saw a row of canvas

tents with pointed tops and also a row of houses. The noise they heard came from these houses, beside which a group of workmen were putting up more tents.

Captain Kao gave orders to them to halt and the boys sat down to rest. He went to one of the tents and when he met a tall fellow there he saluted him. This tall fellow had an axe in his hand. He was about thirty years of age, with a round face, small eyes and he was dressed in a grey uniform. Looking very polite and kind, he exchanged a few words with Captain Kao who called the boys to attention, and then made a formal introduction:

“Boys, this is Comrade Wei, superintendent of the farm.”

He took the lead and began clapping his hands, but the boys weren't used to this; some clapped their hands and others just stood there, looking at one another.

Superintendent Wei gave them a brief introduction of the farm which he told them had been occupied by the Japanese. It became desolate and deserted during the three years of Kuomintang rule. “Now the People's Government has given us the glorious task of building a large state farm on these ruins where everything will be mechanized.” He then continued, “Labour creates the world. It will be difficult in the beginning but it is better

that 'bitterness goes before sweetness.' We will create a good life with our own hands."

After the superintendent's talk, the carts arrived with their baggage. It was getting dark. The captain divided the boys into teams, and team-leaders were elected. They were quartered in the tents. They were told that someone had been sent to Lutai to buy some lamps and therefore this first night they must go to bed early without lights.

Wooden planks were fixed inside the tents and straw was spread over them on which the boys were to sleep. Their spirits were very low and they started grumbling among themselves.

"What the hell is this? After all that, we've been sent here for hard labour!"

"Bitterness goes before sweetness! It is really 'sweetness before bitterness.' "

Little Black Horse lay lazily stretched out on the straw bed. He was cursing to himself.

"Damn it!" Little Black Horse muttered audibly. "I was doing all right outside — but you played a dirty trick on me. You got in the mud yourself, and you wanted to drag other people into the mud also."

Niu Niu knew that this was obviously directed against him. He pretended not to hear. He hummed a song to himself. Seeing that Niu Niu

was not attempting to pick up his challenge, Little Black Horse became more angry.

“Look here, you son-of-a-bitch. You think you are smart to flatter the captains. You thought you would be a big shot, judging by the way you acted all the time, but you’re nothing but a team-leader!”

Niu Niu was an honest boy. He never liked to quarrel or to make trouble. He only lost his temper when he was provoked and he could no longer control himself. As Little Black Horse said even worse things at last he could no longer stand the insults, so he stood up with his two hands by his side, and asked:

“Little Black Horse, what are you talking about? Who are you swearing at?”

“Anyone who wants to listen!” replied Little Black Horse, still cursing. Little Black Horse also stood up. There they stood facing each other, as two cocks do before the fight starts. Each glared at the other. Ordinarily, Big-eyed Monkey liked to participate in all bouts, but today he was not in the mood. He whispered something into Little Black Horse’s ear, dragging him away. They both ran out of the tent.

The moon was already up. The croaking of the frogs was heard everywhere. The two boys went to the edge of a stream. They picked up some



pebbles and threw them into the water. The reflection of the moon in the water was broken by ripples. Big-eyed Monkey said:

“It’s very deep!”

“It looks it. Can you swim?” Little Black Horse asked.

“No, can you?”

“No.”

“Then, there’s no chance of getting away.”

“No, no chance at all.”

“Isn’t it rotten?”

“Yes, it’s really tough.”

“It’s bad luck.”

“They played a trick on us.”

Seeing that their hope of escape was dashed to pieces, Little Black Horse and Big-eyed Monkey eyed each other peevishly. In low spirits, they went back to the tent.

#### 4. The Competition

The Youth Group commenced work. For several days, they moved bricks, putting good ones together so that these could be used for building purposes and separating the broken ones, which

were put in another lot so that they could be used for paving the roads. Some boys slung them over their backs; some carried them in front; there were also groups of two boys carrying a basket of bricks together.

Big-eyed Monkey and Little Black Horse were the naughtiest of the whole lot. They always went together.

Some carried ten bricks at a time; some carried twenty or more at a time, but Monkey and Horse did the poorest job and carried the smallest number of bricks. Big-eyed Monkey never took more than five or six at a time. When people criticized him for not working properly, he began to kick about it and winked at them; he even made all sorts of funny grimaces. He did not feel ashamed about it and even tried to be cheeky, "I was born on the Fruit Hill and I never learned to carry bricks. If you insist on making me work hard, I will not take you to the Western Heaven."\*

Little Black Horse had been a member of the "gang" for two years during which he had never done any physical labour. Therefore, he too had become lazy and did not want to work properly.

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\* Here Big-eyed Monkey was pretending to be the famous Monkey in the Chinese popular novel *The Pilgrimage to the West* of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

When Niu Niu pointed it out to him, he began to get cheeky and started to chant:

"I am carrying bricks, but you say I am a dodger. I'll hit you on the head with one of these bricks, and then we'll see if you still want to say such things about me."

Little Black Horse lifted a brick over his head and pretended to throw it. Although he did not actually throw it, Niu Niu became very angry. In a minute, Niu Niu also started to sing a few lines something like this: "You little devil, you lazy-bones. When you eat, you choose the biggest piece of steamed bread; when you work, you try to lag behind. Why don't you feel ashamed!"

Niu Niu's words reminded the boys in the group that Little Black Horse always got hold of a large bowl at mealtime. Sometimes when he had finished eating, he would take two loaves of steamed bread along to eat later.

Little Black Horse was certainly embarrassed; his face became red. He wanted to have a fight with Niu Niu, but he was afraid that the captain would punish him and ask him to clean the toilet. Giving up, he started to move the bricks. He retorted, "I eat a lot because I have a big stomach. I don't think the food is bought with your money. So you'd better mind your own business."

One day, all the boys went to remove the weeds

on a piece of land where they were going to build a house. After a while, team-leader Niu Niu discovered that two boys had disappeared. These were Big-eyed Monkey and Little Black Horse.

"Big-eyed Monkey!" "Little Black Horse!" Niu Niu called out loudly, but the two boys were nowhere to be found. Erh Hsiao-tse, Sun Hsiao-pao and the other boys all stopped working and began to kick up a row about it.

"This won't do. If they don't work, we won't go on either!"

"If they can go for fun, we want to knock off work too."

"They eat and do nothing."

"Kick them out of our team. We don't want them."

During this confusion, Captain Liu Teh-shan came along. Angrily, Niu Niu told him the story.

"Captain, Big-eyed Monkey and Little Black Horse are too mischievous. We don't want them in our team. You had better transfer them to another one."

"Suppose no other team wants them!" Liu Teh-shan smiled.

"Then throw them out of the farm."

"Where can they go, then?"

"Anywhere, any place!" Niu Niu said.

"Let them go back to their old 'trade,'" Sun Hsiao-pao interrupted.

"Is that what we should do?"

No one replied. Liu Teh-shan then said in a kindly way:

"Boys, we've got to develop a spirit of fraternal love and mutual aid. They don't like to work, but it is our duty to help them. You go ahead with your work. I'll go right now and get them. All right?"

"All right. You go and get them," Niu Niu answered.

Uncle Liu Teh-shan whispered something into Niu Niu's ear and limped away.

He first went to the tent but nobody was there. He shouted at the top of his voice and nobody answered him. He wondered how he could find them in such a big place. Just at this moment, he noticed some smoke coming out from behind a clump of shrubs. Could it be that someone was setting fire to them? As he neared the clump, he overheard a conversation between the two lads.

"Everything ready?"

"Yes, it's all ready."

"You can start to cut."

"Hurry up, now. . . ."

Anxious to know what these two naughty boys were actually doing, Liu Teh-shan parted the leafy branches and peeped in. He saw Big-eyed Monkey

and Little Black Horse sitting on the ground. They were skinning a frog and roasting it on a fire. Near them, about a dozen frogs were tied together with a cord. As he ate the roasted frog, Little Black Horse said:



“This one is not bad, there is a lot of meat on the legs.”

As they were enjoying themselves, a sudden shout from behind caught them unprepared. “What are you doing here?”

They were greatly surprised. Little Black Horse made haste to put the frogs behind him. Big-eyed Monkey hurriedly stamped out the fire with his feet and tried to remove the skins. But it was too late and the captain was already standing in front of them.

“Don’t try to hide anything now! I have already seen everything. Say, you two, the others are all working now. Why are you two here having a good time?”

Big-eyed Monkey always took the lead in mischief-making, but when it was discovered he

always tried his best to dodge trouble and let Little Black Horse bear the brunt. So he winked at Little Black Horse, who then said:

"Captain, after half a day's work, we're dead tired. So we took a little time off. Even a frog has to take a rest after hopping a while."

"Why don't others get tired? Why is it that you are the only boys who get tired? Big-eyed Monkey, what have you to say?"

Big-eyed Monkey was put on the spot by this question and found nothing convincing to say. He pretended that he didn't feel strong enough.

"I've never done any hard work before. My parents never did any such work either."

"How did they make a living, then?"

"Some farm hands helped us with the work."

"Oh, I see, you were from a landlord's family. Then, how did you come to be a beggar?"

"Afterwards, we became poor."

"Say, young man, when you live off the labour of other people, we call it exploitation; it's shameful. If you work yourself, it is honourable. You can't go on living the old way; you've got to understand this."

Big-eyed Monkey was stunned, looking at the ground. He could find nothing to say.

"You think," Captain Liu Teh-shan went on to say. "Where shall we live when the weather gets

cold? Do you mean to say we can live in the tents during the winter? We have to work and put up some houses. Won't it be much better to live in a house during the winter?"

Big-eyed Monkey did not seem to believe in what the captain had said, "Oh, well, I have had enough of it. When the houses are ready, perhaps you big shots will move in first."

This angered the captain who had never lost his temper before.

"Look here, what do you mean? Have I cheated you before? When the houses are ready, you boys will not only have a share in the success of the work but you will also have priority in living in them."

Little Black Horse then interrupted by saying, "We two don't want to work together with Niu Niu and the other boys; we will form a team by ourselves."

"What for?"

"They blame us all the time."

"You will have to work well; then they won't make trouble for you. If they still do it, you can come and tell me."

Little Black Horse nodded. So they followed the captain, but as they walked, Little Black Horse felt something hitting him in the back all the time. He had forgotten about the frogs which were still hung from his belt. He quickly took them off and



threw them away.

When they arrived at the place, Captain Liu Teh-shan shouted to them:

"Boys, now let's have some competitions, and see who can cut the biggest quantity of weeds. We will praise the best and criticize the poorest worker. What do you say, boys?"

Together they shouted, "That's fine."

Niu Niu looked at Liu Teh-shan first and then purposely said to Little Black Horse:

"Do you dare to challenge me?"

"Why say 'no'? You don't possess an extra hand." Little Black Horse, who had a strong sense of self-respect, accepted the challenge.

Niu Niu wanted to make this lazy boy work hard. Therefore, he challenged Little Black Horse again, "I don't have three hands, but I think I can beat you easily."

"No more boasting, let's try it out in the field, and see who will win."

"All right! Let's start the competition right away."

The two boys went together and clasped each other's hands. It meant that the competition between them was on.

Little Black Horse was really keen about it and so he took off his shirt, took up the scythe and began mowing. One heap after another was piled

up. At the same time, he frequently stole a glance at Niu Niu whose heaps of weeds also grew higher and higher all the time.

After cutting for a while, Big-eyed Monkey became irritable, murmuring and complaining all the time, "Damn it, they're making us work like a coolie here." He only pretended to cut the weeds. At the same time, he kept banging his implement on the stones. In a few minutes, he had spoiled the scythe. Then he shouted:

"Captain, my scythe is dull. It's no good for cutting now."

Kao Pao-yuan, the deputy captain, ran up to him and saw that the edge of the scythe was ruined.



So he asked Big-eyed Monkey:

"Why is it that your implement is so badly damaged?"

Erh Hsiao-tse cried out, "Captain, I know what happened. I saw him bang the scythe on the stones. He spoiled the scythe that way."

When people exposed his dirty tricks, he became angry with shame. He frowned and started to swear:

"You damn liar. Who saw me?"

Captain Kao was incensed with anger at the rascally way in which Big-eyed Monkey had acted. He shouted at the boy:

"Look here. You have spoiled public property and sworn at the others. You'll have to be punished for these offences."

All the boys shouted in approval.

"Lock him up. That will do him good!"

"Lock him up in a dark room!"

"See if he will act like this again!"

Captain Liu Teh-shan came along and tried to make a compromise. "Captain Kao, I think you should excuse him for this first offence. If he does it again, we will give him a heavier punishment next time."

Then he turned to Big-eyed Monkey, "Look at Little Black Horse now. He has already cut down

heaps of weeds. He has been so energetic today. Why not learn from him?"

Seeing that the situation was against him, Big-eyed Monkey changed his tactics and pretended to get interested in the work. He picked up the damaged scythe and started cutting. He murmured, "I didn't damage the scythe intentionally."

The remarks made by the captain encouraged Little Black Horse who now worked with redoubled enthusiasm. By an accident, some pieces of broken glass left on the ground cut his foot which began to bleed. Seeing it, Liu Teh-shan said:

"Little Black Horse, you'd better hurry up and go to the clinic and have your foot attended to."

Little Black Horse did not pay any attention to the captain. He went on mowing the weeds as if he had not heard him. The captain asked him to take a rest, but Little Black Horse was reluctant to stop his work.

"Don't bother me," he burst out. "If I lose this competition, I'll hold you responsible!"

Liu Teh-shan not only did not become angry, but on the contrary he smiled at the boy.

When they had a meeting that night, Little Black Horse was commended for his energetic spirit at work, while Big-eyed Monkey was severely criticized and at the same time he was transferred to another team.

## 5. It Doesn't Pay to Deceive

After the competition, Little Black Horse began to change. He often challenged Niu Niu and tried his best to work well. In study, he also wanted to do his best. Their new teacher, Master Chen, often praised him for his cleverness and diligence. The more people praised him, the harder and better he studied and learned. Since he was now separated from Big-eyed Monkey, he could not play tricks single-handed and therefore he gradually got along with the other boys in his team. The captain was especially fond of him because he made the greatest improvement. Every night, the captain would limp into the different tents to chat with the boys. When he came to Little Black Horse's tent, he liked to sit on the bed and talk to him. One time he noticed Little Black Horse's trousers had some holes in them; so he gave him his own. At night, Little Black Horse usually kicked off his quilt and lay uncovered in bed. On his regular rounds through the tents with a lantern in his hand, Liu Teh-shan always picked up the blanket and covered him up properly again.

Who would expect that Little Black Horse who had been so good for a while would become naughty again?

One day the boys were digging pits in which to plant trees. Each pit was to be one foot in diameter and two feet deep. Little Black Horse's pick was not a serviceable one, the ends being too dull and the handle too long. Perhaps it was because he did not know how to handle the implement or because the ground was too hard, but when he began to dig, the pick benumbed his hands. He spent a good deal of time in digging the ground, and yet he only dug five pits while Niu Niu had already finished over a dozen. Little Black Horse now knew that he would certainly be the loser, and so he began to kick up a row about it.

"I am not going on now. You boys gave me a rotten implement. You've got hold of the best implements. That is why I am lagging behind so much. This won't do."

"What a shame!" Niu Niu laughed heartily. "You don't blame yourself for not being able to handle the implement properly, but you start to kick up a row about the implement. It's just a matter of technique."

"Say, if you have the guts, let's exchange implements and see how you get on."

Niu Niu made a funny grimace and said, "I've no guts! I don't want to do that."

Just then, Captain Liu Teh-shan came on the scene. "Niu Niu," he said, "be a nice chap. You

have lived in the country and have had some experience with farming implements. Little Black Horse doesn't know anything about handling them. You should help him. Come on. Let him have your pick."

Niu Niu was not very keen about it, but in the end he exchanged implements with Little Black Horse.

Little Black Horse was glad to have the new pick. He thought that it really was a better one. But after a while, he began to feel that it too was rather heavy. It seemed to become more and more heavy. Some blisters began to show on his hands. He looked around and noticed that not only Niu Niu was far ahead in digging more pits than he, but that other boys also had dug more pits.

"What shall I do now? I already have a new pick. There is no other excuse I can find." He lazily lifted the pick and let it fall lightly down. He said to himself, "I am lagging behind now and I'll come out last anyway."

At last, he threw the pick down and sat on the ground, putting his hands on his stomach. Captain Liu came over to him again, asking:

"What's wrong, Little Black Horse?"

"My stomach hurts."

"Is it serious?"

"Oh! — Oh!"

The captain was worried.

"Oh! I guess I know the reason. Last night, I didn't go to your tent. You must have kicked off your quilt and you've caught cold. You had better go to the clinic."

"No!"

"Why not? Go to the clinic and get some medicine."

"No, I won't!"

"What's the reason? Why don't you want to go?"

"It's very painful. I can't walk."

"Come on, boy, I'll go with you." Liu Teh-shan came over to help him.

"Ah! . . ." Little Black Horse cried out.

The captain was at a loss to know what to do. "Can it be cholera? It wasn't so bad a few minutes ago." This made him think that he should insist on taking Little Black Horse to the clinic to receive medical treatment immediately.

"Little Black Horse, I'll go and get a doctor or I'll carry you over to the clinic."

Although Little Black Horse pretended to be sick, he was secretly laughing at the captain, "My dear lame uncle, can you really carry me?" He knew that the captain always meant what he said, and therefore he uttered something indistinctly.



“No . . . I don’t want you to carry me. I’ll try to walk over . . . slowly.”

Therefore, with Liu Teh-shan supporting him he walked slowly to the clinic.

As they walked along, Little Black Horse saw a pair of brown rabbits playing under a tree. The one in the front stood up, scratching its ears, and turned its head watching its companion with its coal-black eyes. The one in the rear was nosing the ground as it hopped along. Little Black Horse’s eyes became bright. Two rabbits! It was not often he saw two rabbits, but he would be satisfied if he could catch just one. He hurried over to the willow tree.

“Don’t run. Be careful,” the captain cried after him.

Little Black Horse thought, “I am supposed to be a sick man. I complained of a pain in the belly.” He had to slow down his steps. Captain Liu ran up to him from behind, asking:

“Why did you run?”

“My stomach is aching terribly — I want to go to the toilet.”

“Hold on a little bit. We’ll get there in a minute. Didn’t we say, ‘We mustn’t relieve ourselves in public places.’ We must observe the rules of sanitation.”

Little Black Horse had to nod his head, signifying his approval. As he walked on, he turned his head looking at the two rabbits which were really lovely.

Finally they arrived at the clinic.

Little Black Horse had never been in a clinic, nor had he received any medical treatment before. Before he went to the Home, he often used to go hungry for a day or two but when he became sick, nobody cared for him. He was just left to his fate. As soon as he went inside the door of the clinic, everything seemed strange to him — from the men and women medical workers in white overalls to the peculiar odour of the medicine.

They sat in the waiting-room, waiting for his turn. Little Black Horse asked the captain in a low voice:

“Uncle Liu, why do they wear white gowns?”

“It is sanitary.”

“Why must one wear a white gown to be sanitary?”

Before the captain could answer him, someone called out:

“Ma Ping-erh — who is Ma Ping-erh?”

“Hurry up. It’s your turn now,” said the captain, giving him a push.

This reminded Little Black Horse that his name was Ma Ping-erh. That day when Liu Teh-shan

had asked him to put down his name, he had given him a false one and he himself could never remember it.

Very uneasily, Little Black Horse walked into an inner room. An old doctor asked him to sit down.

“What’s your trouble?”

“A pain in the belly.”

“Are your bowels loose?”

An idea came to Little Black Horse’s mind that if he were really sick, they would be loose. So he said, “Watery like soup.”

“How many times a day?”

“Over twenty times a day.”

This gave the old doctor a surprise. “What! Twenty times a day?”

“Yes.”

“With pus and blood?”

“Yes.”

Little Black Horse did not know what he was talking about, but, anyhow, he thought it would be right to say “Yes.” The old doctor frowned and shook his head in perplexity. He said, “Well, let me examine you.”

Then he took out a glass-tube. After rubbing it with cotton, he asked Little Black Horse to open his mouth. He placed it under his tongue.

“Keep your mouth shut. Don’t bite it! Don’t talk.”

Little Black Horse thought to himself, "Things are certainly getting worse! Will this little glass-tube betray me? What can I do if it finds out that I am not sick?" The pack of lies he had told a few minutes ago frightened him now. In the past, it had always seemed to him that the more and bigger lies he could tell, the better and more fun



it was. But now he wished he could cover them up. He put his hand into his pocket and felt a match-stick left there from the day when he and his pal Big-eyed Monkey had roasted the frogs. When nobody noticed him, he put the match-stick in his nose and tickled it. Instantly, he sneezed and in doing so the glass-tube flew out of his mouth, dropped on the ground and broke into pieces.

The old doctor jumped up from his chair and ran over to Little Black Horse. Then he started to look at the thermometer on the ground; and it really made his heart ache to find that it had broken into pieces. He was really cross about it.

“Look here! You have broken my thermometer. I just got it today from Tientsin. It is very hard to get one. Why didn’t you take care of it?”

Little Black Horse chuckled to himself and he apologized for what he had done, saying, “I am so sorry about it. I sneezed. I couldn’t help it. Can you control yourself when you want to sneeze?”

The old doctor was a kind-hearted man. He was no longer angry and he even felt sorry for blaming Little Black Horse.

“I’m sorry I blamed you so much. Come on over here, take off your trousers and lie down.”

Little Black Horse obeyed instructions and lay on a narrow bed. He did not know what was coming next. “What is he going to do to me now?” he wondered. The doctor felt his abdomen and said, “How does it feel here. Painful?”

Little Black Horse gave whatever answer came to his mind first, “This place is very painful. This place is also painful. It is also painful here.”

After the examination, the old doctor gave him a prescription and told him to go to the pharmacy to get some medicine. The doctor also added that he should eat specially prepared food and have plenty of rest.

Little Black Horse felt relieved when he walked away from the old doctor. When he thought that

nobody noticed him, he threw away the prescription.

When he came to the waiting-room, Captain Liu Teh-shan asked him, "What did the doctor say? Is it serious?"

Little Black Horse took it seriously and said, "The doctor said I must eat some specially prepared food and have plenty of rest."

"What about the medicine?"

"No medicine. Perhaps I'll be all right after a good rest."

"Why didn't he give you any medicine? How can you get cured without taking medicine?" The captain was getting anxious about it.

Just at this moment, a nurse, with her hair in two short plaits, rushed out and called loudly, "Ma Ping-erh . . . Ma Ping-erh!" When she came up to Little Black Horse, she said crossly, "Why did you throw the prescription on the floor? It's lucky I picked it up. Hurry up and get your medicine."

He was very annoyed at the nurse. "Why would I thank you for bringing me that? I don't want it."

After he had the prescribed medicine from the pharmacy, Captain Liu went back to the tent with him. He made Little Black Horse take a dose of medicine and lie in bed. After helping to cover him up and repeatedly telling him to be careful, he finally left the tent.

At mealtime, Uncle Wang, the cook, brought him some special food. Little Black Horse thought it would be specially prepared noodles and something good, but instead it was a bowl of watery rice with a bit of salted vegetable. Little Black Horse was surprised when he looked at it, "What! A bowl of rice water! Is this the specially prepared food?"

"The captain said that you are suffering from a pain in the stomach and you can't eat dry food. Also, you can't eat meat. You must eat less for the time being."

"But you have to give me enough. Why not bring along two more bowls like this? That will be better," Little Black Horse called out, nearly crying.

"My dear boy, I can't do it. The captain gave strict instructions which have to be carried out faithfully. You are suffering from diarrhoea — you mustn't eat much. Better go hungry for a few days. It will help you to get better quickly."

Uncle Wang was very kind and yet quite resolute. He did as he said. After telling Little Black Horse this, he went away.

What the hell was this? He did not feel he had eaten anything when he had finished the bowl of rice water.

Little Black Horse took a nap. When he awoke, there was no one in the tent. It was really lonely. Suddenly, he thought of those two little rabbits he

had seen on the way to the clinic. Perhaps they were still there eating grass. Perhaps they were in a hole under the tree. When he thought of this, he jumped out of bed and dressed himself. He ran directly to the place where he had seen the rabbits. The rabbits were not there and so he spent a good deal of time looking for them but they were nowhere to be found. Right then he smelled something delicious which really made his mouth water. It reminded him that the day before, the captain had announced that the leadership had sent a big pig to the Youth Group for a treat. Last night, some boys said that they heard the noise when the pig was killed. He was pretty sure that they would have minced meat for supper that night. He followed the beautiful aroma which brought him right into the kitchen. Uncle Wang was at the water tub washing cabbages. There was nobody in the kitchen at the moment. That lovely odour was obviously coming from a big cooking pot. Little





Black Horse was extremely hungry. The minced meat in the pot offered too big a temptation for him to resist. How nice it would be if he could take a bowl for himself. He did not give it a second thought but took a bowlful of pork and wrapped it in a piece of cloth which had been hung out to dry. He tiptoed out of the kitchen and went back to his tent. He used both hands and finished the meat in no time, although it was still half raw. For fear that he would be discovered, he practically swallowed it whole.

Soon afterwards, Little Black Horse really became sick — his stomach began to ache badly. He wanted to go to the toilet all the time — in fact, he went more than twenty times that night!

## 6. Escape

All the while Little Black Horse was sick in bed, Captain Liu gave him loving and tender care. Each day, he brought him food and water. At night, he came to Little Black Horse's tent several times with a lamp. One time Little Black Horse had soiled his trousers because he could not get to the toilet in time. There was such a bad odour that nobody would even come near him. When the boy was

sound asleep, Captain Liu took his trousers and washed them in the stream.

Little Black Horse was greatly moved by all this. He really was an orphan. His father had died when he was nine years old. When he was ten, his mother married again. So she took Little Black Horse and his small sister to her second husband's home. His stepfather was such a hard-hearted man that within six months' time Little Black Horse found life intolerable and ran away. So he had started life on his own as a loafer hanging around the street corners all the time. He did all sorts of things — picking up scraps on the streets, selling newspapers, and so on. In this way, he struggled along for two years. Later, he got acquainted with the gangmaster Smallpox Li and became a small beggar. Who had cared for him all these years? There was not a single person who really loved him and treated him with kindness. Therefore, when he opened his eyes and saw Liu Teh-shan sitting on the bed with his clean trousers in his hand, he was so deeply moved that he could not speak for a few minutes. When the captain asked him to put on the trousers, he obediently followed instructions. Grasping the crippled uncle's hand firmly in his, he asked:

“Uncle Liu, why do you treat me so kindly?”

Uncle Liu was quite unprepared for such a question.

“Oh! That’s nothing!”

Little Black Horse repeated persistently:

“Then, why are you so kind to me?”

“Ha! You little devil. Do you really want to know? Well, you are a young builder of socialism. How can I not take care of you?” and he pointed at Little Black Horse’s nose as he spoke and smiled, exposing his fine white teeth. He patted the boy on the head, pausing a minute and then continued:

“Perhaps I got this from the army. Little Black Horse, you know, I came from the People’s Liberation Army. In the PLA, there is a tradition that the squad leader looks after the soldiers and the old-timers look after the new soldiers. We all treat each other as though we belonged to the same family. You said you were an orphan and had no father. I also have no father. Your father was a pedicab driver; my father was a farm hand, also one of the oppressed. My father died when I was ten. I worked for a landlord as a cowherd. If the cow refused to eat grass, I had to take the blame and the landlord would beat me for it. When I grew a little older, about your age now, I began to understand things better. One day, I pushed the landlord’s cow off a precipice. Of course, it was killed. Then I ran away and joined the People’s

Liberation Army. Nobody treated me better than our squad leader. Really he treated me better than I have treated you. Although I have become disabled and have left the army, I am still a fighter — a fighter on the production front. I still have to preserve the glorious traditions of the PLA.”

When he got to this point, he stopped. Perhaps it was his love for the army life that reminded him of the past. Perhaps it was the new construction work that gave him inspiration and therefore he sat thinking for a long time. Then he looked at Little Black Horse’s dark thin face. He continued apologetically, “I am to blame for your sickness. That night was very cold. I didn’t come to your tent to look after you boys. It must have been the cold. That is why you became sick. . . .”

Little Black Horse’s face suddenly became very red and he was very embarrassed. He found himself interrupting by saying, “Uncle Liu, don’t go on, it was because . . . because. . . .” He wanted to tell him what had really happened, but was too ashamed to say that he had pretended to be sick, and had then eaten the stolen pork. How could he say that? Therefore, he stammered, saying, “I . . . I . . . I am to blame. I really deserve a good scolding. When I get well, I’ll redouble my efforts both in work and in study and listen to you. You will be happy about that, won’t you?”

The captain was really happy about that. He patted Little Black Horse on the head and said, "Very good, young fellow. I believe you really will do it. Let's make our farm a beautiful place, and grow thousands of mou of rice, wheat, and cotton and put up big storey-buildings with well-paved roads. . . ."

Little Black Horse interrupted him again, saying, "With playgrounds and basketball courts like they have in the schools. Can we?"

"Why not?" Liu Teh-shan said with confidence. "We will have basketball courts, football grounds, recreational clubs and a library. . . . Well, when that time comes, our place will really look like a farm."

\*

Little Black Horse recovered slowly. Then one night there was a terrible typhoon. It was so violent and so destructive that it brought great havoc to the new farm that was being built.

The day before the typhoon, Superintendent Wei picked up the warning from the radio. The farm staff was mobilized and made preparations. The boys in the Youth Group fixed the stakes of their tents tightly and firmly. The workmen moved all the cement to places where it could be covered with canvas and fastened down tightly with cords.

The two boats were used to make countless trips and move foodstuffs to places of safety.

But the typhoon came two hours earlier than expected. It arrived shortly after three o'clock in the morning.

When the typhoon hit, Little Black Horse and the other boys were sound asleep. A flash of lightning together with a loud peal of thunder awakened them. Outside their tent came a howl as if wild animals were fighting with one another. Each flash of lightning could be seen through the slits in the tent. Each flash was followed by loud thunder. The deafening noise sounded like big wooden balls rolling all over the sky. The stakes and props in the tent began to crack and it seemed as if the tent would be blown away at any moment. The boys were terrified. They were all holding their breath, clinging tightly to their blankets not daring to speak.

Suddenly, a black shadow appeared at the door. It was Captain Liu Teh-shan who called out:

"Boys, two tents have been blown down. Get up quickly, fix the tent again, tie it firmly and make it strong!"

The boys got up. Some went out of the tent without waiting to put on their trousers. Everybody got busy; some tightened the cords and others fixed the props in the tent again. Little Black

Horse had just recovered from his sickness and was not very strong yet. He was nearly blown off his feet by the wind and he shivered in the cold which went right through his body. He cried out loudly:

"Captain . . . Uncle Liu . . . come here quickly. This cord is nearly broken!"

Erh Hsiao-tse came with a cord. He tried to fasten it, but it was too dark to see how to do it. A cry was heard on the other side of the tent. It was Niu Niu who shouted, "This is also broken. Give me a cord — here!"

The tent was surrounded on all sides by boys who called for this and shouted for that. Just at this moment a loud cracking sound was heard. Everyone was terrified because nobody knew what had happened. Captain Liu left some of the boys to stay and fix the tent and took some of them to render first-aid wherever it was needed. They found that one of the tents had fallen and the boys cried:

"Captain, what shall we do now? We have no place to go!"

"We have no place to go!"

"Never mind. You can go into a nearby tent — double up a bit for the time being," the captain called out, trying to comfort the boys.

At this moment, Little Black Horse heard a faint cry that seemed to come from under the fallen tent.

“Help! Help!”

Little Black Horse knew from the voice who it was that called out.

“Hurry up, Captain. Big-eyed Monkey is inside, crying for help!”

It happened like this. When the typhoon came, all the boys in this tent turned out to work trying to fix it up. Only the lazy and cunning Big-eyed Monkey stayed behind, hiding himself in the tent. Luckily the central pillar had not fallen on his head, otherwise it would have killed him instantly. Although there was no great danger, the big heavy canvas had fallen down, covering him all over. But that was bad enough for him. He was nearly suffocated and not able to move his feet or hands. He thought he was going to die, therefore he cried out loudly, but his voice was only heard faintly outside.

Everybody got busy then, pulling the canvas here and tugging at it there; and in the end they pulled out Big-eyed Monkey.

Suddenly, the rain began. It was such a down-pour that it was like a cloud-burst. Little Black Horse pulled Big-eyed Monkey with him and they went to his tent with the other boys. It was so crowded in there that nobody was able to move, let alone lie down to sleep.

After daybreak, the thunder and lightning stopped, but the wind increased and the downpour



of rain became more terrific. Many of the big trees were uprooted; half of the saplings had been washed away. In the rivers the water rose to a dangerous level. If the water rushed in through the dykes, the rice fields would be submerged, and the lives of the people would be threatened.

The whole farm was now faced with danger — a grave danger.

Superintendent Wei took the lead and was followed by the cadres, the workmen and boys of the Youth Group — they all went to the dykes. Even the crippled Captain Liu joined them. Everybody carried earth to reinforce the dykes with sandbags. They all worked in the rain and mud and were covered with dirt. The boys' clothes were torn and worn out quickly with all this hard labour. After a day's work, they couldn't even recognize each other. This battle against the floods went on for three successive days and then the wind stopped, but the rain kept on. The next difficult problem that faced them was that of food. As they did not have a warehouse, their grain supply did not last them very long. Moreover, the fuel was wet; therefore they couldn't cook their food very well.

Morale, however, was high among those who worked on the dykes, including the boys of the Youth Group. They knew that if they wanted to build up their motherland, difficulties like this had

to be overcome. But Big-eyed Monkey found an excuse for not working, saying that his feet were hurt when the tent fell on them. He was sleeping in the tent. Little Black Horse had just recovered from diarrhoea so he helped Uncle Liu do odds and ends for a day, during which he fell down from weakness a number of times. In order to give consideration to his health, Captain Liu told him to stay in the tent. In this way, he had a chance to be together with Big-eyed Monkey.

"These PLA soldiers are big swindlers!" said Big-eyed Monkey. "They promised you food, lodging, and clothing and in the end their promise means nothing. We were brought here to suffer!"

Little Black Horse did not agree with what Big-eyed Monkey said, "Don't be so mean. Do you think we're badly treated on purpose?"

"What does it matter if they do it on purpose or not? A dog is just as bad as a wolf."

"Don't you say that! Haven't you seen Superintendent Wei on the dykes? Our Uncle Liu is disabled, but even he also helped to carry the earth. . . ."

"Our Uncle Liu," Big-eyed Monkey imitated Little Black Horse. "It sounds as if he were a most beloved member of your family! It makes me sick."

“Well, he really is . . . he treats me better than my father did. What do you say?”

“Nothing,” Big-eyed Monkey acted disgracefully and put on an ugly expression. “Say, since he is so intimate with you, why does he let you go hungry? Why doesn’t he give you something nice to eat?”

“Don’t be ridiculous! Where can he get it? He is just like one of us!”

“So, that’s it!” Big-eyed Monkey said with a triumphant air. “Next time you choose a step-father, choose properly. You shouldn’t be a son for nothing.”

Little Black Horse was extremely angry at this insult and he grabbed Big-eyed Monkey, saying, “What do you mean?”

Big-eyed Monkey was caught unprepared, so he smiled, saying, “Why are you angry? We have to be somebody’s sons anyway.”

“You stop it!” Little Black Horse shouted, now sitting on Big-eyed Monkey’s body, holding his head and banging it on the pillow (which was not a real pillow but a piece of brick). Although Big-eyed Monkey was older than Little Black Horse, he wasn’t such a strong boy. After his head had been banged against the brick several times, Big-eyed Monkey pleaded, “That is enough, my dear brother. I won’t say it again.”

Little Black Horse let go of him. He went to his own bed but was still very peeved. After a while, Big-eyed Monkey took out some marbles and asked Little Black Horse to play with him, saying, "When we fight, we fight like enemies. But after the fight, let's be friends again."

It kept on raining. There seemed to be no end to it. Life was becoming harder, as the food supply began to run short. Big-eyed Monkey was planning to run away from the farm, but he did not dare to do it alone. In an attempt to pump something out of Little Black Horse, one day he said to him:

"Brother, what do you say? We don't have enough to eat now. The tent is too crowded. It's certainly lousy staying here. . . ."

Little Black Horse replied, "Uncle Liu said that this is only a temporary difficulty. It will be over as soon as the weather clears up."

"But when the weather gets better and more food is brought to the farm, we'll have to work hard again. How rotten!"

"Oh! Don't grumble. You always kick up a row about things. Let's play cards." Little Black Horse took out a very old and dirty set of playing cards which he had kept. The two boys sat on the bed and started playing.

Since he had obtained no favourable response

from Little Black Horse, Big-eyed Monkey dared not go on with what he wanted to say.

The rain continued for another three days, sometimes only drizzling but sometimes pouring down. It did not look as though there would be any fine weather for a long time. The food problem had become more difficult and the food supply had nearly given out. All there was to eat was congee or watery rice. Since recovering from his recent sickness, Little Black Horse had a good appetite. He seemed to be hungry all day, but he could not find anything to eat. But Big-eyed Monkey teased him, saying:

“Little Black Horse, you are certainly a good boy. You can stand all this. Really you deserve to be called a hero!”

“Go away! Why don’t you say something nice for a change?”

“I can’t go on like this. I will die here either from hunger or from frustration.”

Little Black Horse drew a long sigh but did not say anything.

In fact, he also felt fed up. It was raining outside all the time. Everybody was out working. Only the two of them were left in the tent. They had played all the games they could think of — marbles, cards and so on.

Big-eyed Monkey challenged Little Black Horse again, saying, "Little Black Horse, we can't make a living here! I've made up my mind. I'm going to run away! What do you say?"

"Where are you going?"

"I have a cousin in business at the White Pavilion. We can both go to him. Anything he can find for us will certainly be better than this place!"

"I am not going!"

"Why not?"

"I don't have a cousin!"

"Never mind. We are like brothers. My cousin is your cousin. We are in the same boat. If anything happens, we'll share the same fate. I will never let you down. Little Black Horse, you just think about it. When we get a job outside and have some money, we can go to the show after supper. There we can enjoy the play *Monkey King Storms the Dragon's Palace*. Won't that be nice?"

Little Black Horse had always been fascinated by plays about the Monkey King. In the old days when he was selling newspapers and doing other odds and ends, he often slipped away to see a play; he would even go hungry to save enough for admission to a theatre. Now Big-eyed Monkey had reminded him of his long lost pleasure.

Big-eyed Monkey repeated the same story

everyday until Little Black Horse wavered. He said:

"I think we'd better have a talk with Uncle Liu and let him know about it. After all, this is not a hotel, where we can come and go at any time. We must get permission. If we cannot find anything then, we can come back."

"You really are a fool!" Big-eyed Monkey winked and made all kinds of funny grimaces. "If we want to go, we mustn't tell him. If we tell him, we can't go. Do you think he will let us go if we tell him?"

"I'm afraid you are right," replied Little Black Horse who was now convinced.

That night, the wind ceased blowing and the rain stopped. The dykes were repaired; everybody was exhausted and was sound asleep. At midnight, Big-eyed Monkey woke Little Black Horse and together they put on all the clothes they possessed. Big-eyed Monkey had made preparations for running away days ago. For the past two days, he had started borrowing money from everybody — the cadres, other boys, even the cooks. That evening, when everybody had gone for supper, he had taken out Deputy Captain Kao Pao-yuan's suit length of black cloth from under his bed and put it under his own bedcover. He told Little Black Horse to go out of the tent first and then he wound the cloth around

his waist. They came to the gate and slipped off as fast as they could.

There were no stars in the sky and the moon had not risen, so it was very dark outside. Big-eyed Monkey and Little Black Horse came to the bank of the stream which surrounded the farm on all sides. Big-eyed Monkey said to Little Black Horse, "Do you remember the last time we came here we crossed by wading the stream?"

"I think so. But the water is high now we cannot wade through it, although it used to be only a small stream."





"I don't know whether there is a bridge or not. Let's find out."

As they walked along the bank, Little Black Horse's determination was shaken and his steps became slower and heavier. He thought of crippled Uncle Liu who had gone to Lutai that afternoon to assist in the transportation of foodstuffs. Before he left, he had been to see Little Black Horse and promised to bring him some cakes and fruit on his return. Now, without saying anything, he and Big-eyed Monkey had run away from the farm.

At this moment, Big-eyed Monkey jumped with joy, crying out:

"There is a bridge, Little Black Horse."

Little Black Horse slowly walked up to him and said:

"Big-eyed Monkey, you'd better go alone. I am not going!"

This was a great surprise to Big-eyed Monkey who then threatened him, saying, "Ha! Ha! You want to go back? Do you know what the punishment is for running away?"

"I'll go back and admit what I've done. That will do!"

"Oh no! You will be punished either by death or imprisonment. You think the People's Liberation Army has such slack discipline?"

Little Black Horse did not say anything.

“Come on. Don’t hesitate.\* If they come, both of us will be finished.” Big-eyed Monkey walked onto the bridge, which was made of three wooden poles. He was afraid and said, “Little Black Horse, your eye-sight is better than mine. You walk over it first.”

Little Black Horse felt the bridge with his hands in the darkness and said:

“It is made of three poles nailed together. It’s rather dangerous to walk over.”

“Dangerous? No. They are big wooden poles. Coward, are you scared?”

Urged on by Big-eyed Monkey, Little Black Horse became courageous and crawled on, Big-eyed Monkey following slowly. That bridge had been out of commission for a long time, had never been repaired and was not in good condition. During the typhoon a few days previously, one of the wooden poles had been broken. As Little Black Horse crawled along, cracking sounds were heard. When he was half way, the remaining two wooden poles also cracked. Little Black Horse cried out for help:

“Big-eyed Monkey, give me a hand!”

For fear that he himself would also be dragged into the water, Big-eyed Monkey replied:

“Go on! Just keep crawling over. The poles are not yet broken!”

Just as Little Black Horse made another attempt to crawl on, the poles broke completely. Before he could cry out again, the rushing waves closed over him and carried him away.

Big-eyed Monkey called Little Black Horse's name in a low voice but there was no reply. He stood there looking into the darkness and the rushing water of the stream reminded him that he was in the wilderness all by himself now. He went back to the shore and finally found a way across the river further on.

## 7. The Rescue

When Little Black Horse fell into the water, he lost consciousness for a moment as the water rushed into his mouth and nose. But his mind cleared, and as he clung to one of the two wooden poles he realized that it would save him from sinking. Sometimes, he was lifted up to the surface of the water; sometimes, he was almost drowned. He was terribly cold; and the water in his mouth and nose nearly choked him. It was a terrible experience, but he managed to cling to the piece of wood. However at last, he lost conscious-

ness again when something struck him on the head.

A long time must have passed before Little Black Horse thought he heard someone singing. The sound seemed to be far away; it was soft, and yet very nice to hear. In a semi-conscious state, Little Black Horse wondered, "Who is singing? Am I dead? Am I in heaven or in hell or am I still alive?"

He tried to bite the tip of his tongue because he thought that if he could still feel pain, it would mean he was still alive; if not, then he must be dead. But his jaws were stiff and he was unable to move them. . . .

That strange sound came nearer and nearer; it became louder and louder. He listened attentively; it was not singing.

Little Black Horse struggled, hoping to get up and have a look. But his body was weak all over, he had a bad headache and an uncomfortable feeling in his fingers. After trying for a while, he just managed to open one eye and saw that there was a red cotton-padded coat over his body. He was surprised: "I am a boy, am I not? How is it that a girl's red cotton-padded coat is over me?"

He closed his one eye and lapsed into semi-conscious dreaming, recalling his childhood days. For fear that he would never grow up, his mother had called him by a girl's name and frequently

gave him red clothing when he was little. Later, he didn't like to be called by a girl's name; he objected and afterwards he was called Ma Changsheng. Later on the other boys found it difficult to pronounce such a name, and so he was nicknamed Little Black Horse. Before his father's death, though they were very poor, he and his younger sister were not without the loving tender care of parents. After the death of his father and his mother's remarriage, things took a drastic turn for the worse. The people of the neighbourhood regarded him as an unwelcome dependent in the new family and looked down upon him. His stepfather was a frightful one-eyed man and, whenever he got intoxicated, he beat his wife and stepson. . . .

"Mother, where are you now? Do you know if I am still alive or already dead?" Little Black Horse cried out in his dreams. Gradually he regained consciousness but knew nothing of what had happened to him. "Strange!" he thought, "it is evident that I am not in the water now, but why is it that I am swinging instead of lying still?"

When Little Black Horse opened his eyes again, he saw a rounded straw mat over him in the front of which it seemed there was a "hole" and outside he saw a little girl about 12 or 13 years old squatting in front of a stove. Now it was clear that

the singing sound came from the kettle. As he looked out, the blue sky seemed to be very attractive and lovely; he saw two snow-white birds flying past the boat.

O! It was clear to him now that he was lying in a boat.

The girl cried out, "Daddy, he is alive!"

Little Black Horse saw an old man coming into the cabin and bending over him. From his face he seemed to be an old acquaintance; Little Black Horse seemed to have seen him somewhere before, but he could not remember where. The old man narrowed his eyes and looked kindly at the boy. He sat down beside him and asked:

"What's your name, young fellow? How did you fall into the stream?"

"My name is Little Black Horse. I am. . . ." He could not go on to tell the rest. It would mean a great loss of face to say that he had run away from a farm. He noticed that the little girl was out there laughing at him. Why did she laugh? Perhaps the red cotton-padded coat belonged to her. When he thought of this, he was very anxious to pull the cotton coat off. The old man stopped him, saying:

"Don't push it off. Go on, tell me your story!"

"One night, I wasn't careful in walking. I fell into the water."







"Oh, where is your home?"

"I have no home. Both my parents are dead."

"What a pity! You poor boy! How did you make your living?"

"Working on a . . . boat, as a porter, carrying flour bags," said Little Black Horse, feeling uneasy. He was afraid that the old man would find out the truth so he started to ask the old man some questions in order to stop talking about himself.

"Old uncle, what is your name? Was it you who saved me?"

"My surname is Niu, and people just call me Uncle Niu. This morning, my daughter and I were fishing in the stream. After we cast our net, what do you think we caught? It was a 'little black horse' that came up in the net." The old fisherman broke into laughter. "My eye-sight is no good, but my daughter Chu-chu said that it was a boy. Then we both dragged you up. Your belly was full of water. Your finger-nails were blue. I put a pillow under your body so that a great deal of water came out through your mouth."

Chu-chu, the little girl, laughed and interrupted, "It was like a water tap, the water just rushed out."

Little Black Horse was very embarrassed. He laughed uneasily, "Why was it that I didn't know anything about it?"

Chu chu now brought in some congee with a bowl of fish and some pancakes. Uncle Niu said:

"Well, here you are. We kept these for you. Help yourself. I have to go now."

Then, Uncle Niu and Chu-chu went out of the cabin. They worked hard and had no time to speak to Little Black Horse. It seemed that they had completely forgotten him. Chu-chu worked like a grown-up. Sometimes she rowed with the oar all by herself, although the handle was so rough and her hands were so small. But she managed it efficiently and it moved smoothly in the water like the tail of a fish. Sometimes she helped her father draw in the net; sometimes, she ran to the rear end of the boat to steer like an experienced fisherman.

Only when Little Black Horse picked up the chopsticks did he notice that all of his ten fingertips were swollen — so swollen that he was unable to hold the chopsticks.

"Why were they so swollen?" he thought to himself. It must have been due to the fact that he had used all his strength to cling to the piece of wood in the water. They must have become swollen from gripping so tightly.

"What bad luck!" he thought.

Little Black Horse struggled hard to use the chopsticks. After eating, he took a nap which made him feel much better. But he began to feel uneasy

after waking from his sleep. To go out to help in the work would involve using a great deal of strength which he did not have now. He was also afraid that he would be of no use as a helper because he knew nothing about it. To help a little girl and be her assistant was also something that he did not want to do. Just to lie there alone was really too lonely. It seemed as if he were the only human being left in the world. Why was he in such a situation? It was that Big-eyed Monkey who had the idea of running away from the farm. "He did not even move a finger to save my life. He is selfish; he ran away himself. If I see him again, I'll blow out his brains."

Evening finally came. Uncle Niu took the boat to a quiet bank and anchored it there under the shadow of an old willow tree. Chu-chu had the supper ready also; it consisted again of congee, fish and pancakes. After supper, Uncle Niu took up his pipe and enjoyed a smoke. Then he started to talk about this and that. First he told about his miserable life before liberation; then how his elder son was pressganged into the Kuomintang army and nothing was heard of him again; his younger son was sent to Tientsin as an apprentice and again no trace was found of him afterwards. The one and a half mou of rice paddy on which he worked as a tenant was taken back by the landlord. His

little fishing boat had holes in the bottom and the fishing net was broken. Had it not been for liberation, the old man said, his bones would have decayed long ago. He refilled his pipe and went on with the story:

"Look at my boat; it has new paint — government subsidy. The net has been repaired — also government loan. That young son of mine begged for food for two years in Tientsin. Now he has been well placed on a state farm . . . and he has become a team-leader of a production group. Chu-chu and I have been through thick and thin together. Well, we are not doing badly now!"

"How old is your younger son?" asked Little Black Horse.

"Let me see. He is older than Chu-chu by four years — sixteen now."

"What is his name?"

"His school name is Niu Hsueh-chin, but we used to call him Niu Niu."

"Hey! So you are Niu Niu's old man!" Little Black Horse exclaimed. "That is why I thought to myself that I had seen you somewhere before. Of course a father and his son look alike."

"Surely we should say the son looks like his father," interrupted Chu-chu.

"Well, what's the difference?"

"Do you mean to say that you know our Niu Niu?" the old man inquired eagerly.

"Yes, I do — I know him well. We have been together — living together, eating together, and sleeping together — even sharing the same cotton-padded coat."

"Then you were a beggar also?"

"Yes, we had the same 'master.' "

"Well then, you are one of my son's sworn brothers." The old man became even more friendly towards Little Black Horse and was more interested in the conversation. To express his interest and enthusiasm, he told Chu-chu to take out some pumpkin seeds which he had prepared himself so that they could eat them while they talked together. Both the father and his daughter were interested in knowing about Niu Niu's present life. One after the other they kept on putting questions to Little Black Horse. "Now did you boys get into the Home for the Homeless?" "Was the Home good?" "How about the farm?" "Is the farm big or small?" "Are the boys cold at night?" "What do you boys do on the farm?" "Do you study on the farm?" . . . In order not to disappoint them, Little Black Horse gave all kinds of fancy descriptions which did more than satisfy the father and daughter. At last, the old man asked:

"When did you last see Niu Niu and why did you

leave the farm?"

"Since the farm is so good, why did you go to be a porter on a steamer carrying flour bags?" Chu-chu also asked.

Now Little Black Horse was put on the spot, he felt a burning shame all over him and he was tongue-tied. He hesitated and then said:

"How come you don't understand? I carried the flour bags for the farm. We also ate flour at the farm. Now you know. We have damn good food. One day the leadership gave us a fat pig for a treat, which weighed at least two hundred catties. The minced meat tasted fine!"

Little Black Horse succeeded in taking their attention away from the main topic and the conversation drifted to the pigs and food on the farm. Then Little Black Horse tried his best to turn the conversation away from the farm and talk of other things.

That night, Chu-chu shared the quilt with her father; she let Little Black Horse use hers. Little Black Horse tossed and tossed but he could not go to sleep. His eyes did close for a short while, but when he awoke it was still not daybreak, but the father and daughter had already commenced their day's work.

Little Black Horse had another day's rest in the fishing boat. The good-hearted fisherman per-

sualed him to have a few more days' rest and was not willing to let him go.

On the morning of the third day, Little Black Horse was really impatient. The fisherman and his daughter were very busy, but Little Black Horse was idling — doing nothing. On the boat, there was neither work for him to do nor games for him to play. Unconsciously, his old habit of telling lies returned.

"Uncle Niu, my hands are no longer swollen and I've completely recovered. I'd like to go now, because the captain and the boys on the farm must be very anxious about my whereabouts. They might think I was drowned — they must be expecting my return."

"That means we cannot keep you any longer," Uncle Niu said regretfully. "We will take you back in our boat."

"No, no, no — it's not necessary," Little Black Horse answered quickly, rather frightened.

"Why not let us take you back to the farm in our boat?"

"Because — because — oh, it will stop you from your work. It won't do. I know the way all right. I can easily go back by myself. Don't bother, please."

The old man saw that Little Black Horse was quite determined and therefore he gave him a new

blue cloth jacket to be delivered to Niu Niu upon his return to the farm. Chu-chu also gave him a pair of new shoes for her brother but she was not sure if they would fit her brother's feet. Both father and daughter added that it was in the midst of the fishing season and so they could not come to see Niu Niu at the farm. They would try to come to the farm for a visit when the busy season was over. Little Black Horse said:

"I can tell him all about you, but it would be better if you took him the things yourself."

"Why?"

"I . . . I am such a careless person. Supposing I should lose them."

The old man broke into a laugh. "Oh, no. You won't lose them unless you fall into the river again."

Little Black Horse had to take them. The old man gave him some pancakes and tied the jacket and shoes together in a bundle. He slung it over Little Black Horse's shoulder and accompanied him to the shore. Chu-chu anchored the boat and tied it up so she also jumped off onto the shore. She stood behind her father. Pointing the way to the state farm, Uncle Niu said:

"Little fellow, you boys must work well on the state farm. This is the right thing for you to do. The future holds good prospects for you. Strive to



be a model worker! Everyone in your family will be proud of you if you do so. Little Black Horse, you'll do that, won't you?"

Little Black Horse had to promise that he would do everything as he was advised, and then said: "Uncle Niu, you and . . . Sister Chu-chu saved my life. I must do something good to repay you for your kindness."

This gladdened the heart of Uncle Niu who broke into laughter again. They found it was rather hard to say good-bye, but at last they had to separate. Then the fisherman and his daughter went back to the boat and rowed away.

Little Black Horse hesitated on the shore for some time. As he glanced around him, he saw an expanse of rolling wheat fields with the sun ripening the growing grain. It also shone upon the peasants who worked happily and busily in the fields. Little Black Horse seemed to be in a dream; he had a heavy heart. When he was lying to Uncle Niu and Chu-chu, he forgot he had run away. The longer he had talked with them, the more and bigger lies he told, and it seemed as if everything he said were real. Now he was at the crossroads where he had to choose which he would take — the road leading back to the Lutai State Farm or the other to Tientsin. It was a practical problem for him; he knew he mustn't deceive him-

self any longer. Where was he going? To the farm? No. "A good horse will not turn back to crop the old grass," as the proverb says. He would not go back, lose face and stand all the insults. Yes, he must go to Tientsin — and there he might find Big-eyed Monkey. He was responsible for all this himself, anyway!

Carrying the bag, Little Black Horse walked on the unpaved road leading to Tientsin. Again he was barefooted and in rags.

## 8. A New Woman

That night, after Big-eyed Monkey had succeeded in running away from the farm, he headed for Tientsin. He had never had a cousin in Tientsin, but his purpose in telling Little Black Horse that he had one was to urge him to run away.

On arrival in Tientsin, he first went to the house of Wang the Big Fool to find Smallpox Li. Li and Wang were sworn brothers. When Smallpox Li had found it impossible to carry on the "business" of begging, he collaborated with Wang the Big Fool in running an underground gambling den in the latter's house. It catered to a few undesirables who

happened to live in the district. In addition to gambling, they indulged in opium smoking and so on. Smallpox Li was very happy to have Big-eyed Monkey come back. During the day, he sent Big-eyed Monkey out to steal, while at night, he made him a page boy in the gambling house doing odds and ends for the customers, such as bringing them tea and buying cigarettes. Big-eyed Monkey felt quite "at home" in the gambling house, because he did not have to work or to study. Moreover, there was no such thing as discipline and he didn't have to criticize himself.

One day, while taking a stroll on the street, he heard someone call him:

"Big-eyed Monkey! Big-eyed Monkey!"

He turned and saw it was Little Black Horse's mother. She wore a grey jacket and blue trousers. Formerly, her hair had hung untidily from the back of her head in a plait. It was gone now. Her bobbed hair was neat and clean. In one hand, she was carrying a big parcel and in the other four sticks of sweetened fruits.\* Big-eyed Monkey thought to himself:

"Well! What a big change has taken place in

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\* A stick of sweetened fruits usually consists of five or six hill haws or crab apples pierced in the centre by a small bamboo stick. After being submerged in boiling sugar water, the coating of the fruit solidifies when cooled.

this woman!" Then he asked a few questions as they came to his mind.

"Auntie Chou, haven't seen you for ages. Where are you working now?"

With smiles all over her face, Aunt Chou said, "I am working in the blanket factory — working on cotton-padded coats. What are you doing now?"

"I am working on a farm," Big-eyed Monkey answered lightly.

"What about Chang-sheng now?"

"He's also on the farm. We are together."

Aunt Chou was very glad to learn the whereabouts of her son and felt very enthusiastic, saying:

"Come to our house, will you? I have some sweetened crab apples for you."

As they walked along the pavement together, they made a turn and came to the door of a two-roomed house facing south. At the window of the inner room which was kept open by a makeshift frame, sat her husband — Chou Pao-cheng, the one-eyed man — selling cigarettes. Seeing him, Big-eyed Monkey asked in a very low voice:

"Auntie Chou, I was told that Uncle Chou was put into prison. Was that right?"

"Yes, he was. He served eight months. He was released at the end of the term of imprisonment." Aunt Chou smiled with obvious happiness. "Do you notice any changes in him? I think he wants

to go straight now. He no longer likes to fight. He doesn't swear at people any more. Also he has stopped drinking and smoking. He sits here at the stall all day selling cigarettes and other sundries. He is really a changed man. If this had taken place earlier, my son Chang-sheng would not have run away from home. Oh! The poor boy must have suffered a great deal. . . ."

The woman's eyes were beginning to moisten with tears when she got to this point. She invited Big-eyed Monkey to sit in the outer room and offered him the sweetened crab apples and hurried to the inner room to unpack the parcel. The things she had in it were really articles to sell at the stall — cigarettes, matches, etc., which she had just bought from a wholesale shop. She turned all these over to her husband in the inner room. As she came out, she asked Big-eyed Monkey:

"Big-eyed Monkey, which is your farm?"

"Lutai State Farm."

"Oh! Lutai State Farm. Fine!"

"We belong to the Youth Group on the farm."

"Is that so? The new outfits for the boys in your Youth Group have just been ordered in our factory. Now we are making the cotton-padded coats for the boys. This year each of you boys will be provided with a suit of brand-new cotton-padded coat and trousers. Chang-sheng has grown

up a great deal now, hasn't he? Does he look stronger now?"

"Yes, he is only a little shorter than I. Auntie, I'll tell you something, but you mustn't get worried. Chang-sheng is not well — he's seriously ill."

"What?" The woman was surprised. "Ill? What is the trouble? Is it serious?" She was worried. This was a shock to her.

"The disease is called something like cho-le-ra — it is a serious disease of the stomach."

"Can I go to see him? They say it is only an hour's ride by train."

"You'd better not go there yourself. After you get off from the train, you have to walk a long distance — cross rivers and so on. His condition has improved. What he really needs now is some money. The food on the farm is poor — really miserable. Usually he doesn't have enough food. He is very thin now — really he has become a pack of bones."

At this, tears started to roll down the mother's face very fast. Big-eyed Monkey was very pleased with himself. He had thought of a very good trick.

"Auntie, don't worry. I am going back tomorrow. You'd better let him have some money so that he can buy something to eat. That will take care of him just the same. You don't have to go."

"That's nice of you," said Aunt Chou, going into

the inner room to take the matter up with her husband.

Big-eyed Monkey availed himself of this opportunity to eat some more of the sweetened crab apples. He had already finished two sticks of them and during his hostess' absence he helped himself to another one. While eating them, he looked around the house. Although it was small, it was kept orderly and clean. On the window-sill was a dish of water in which some onions were growing. The small table in the room was wiped very clean so that not a single speck of dust was on the surface. Suddenly, his eyes fell upon a spectacle case. He put down the stick of sweetened crab apples he was eating, and opened the case carefully noticing that the spectacles were for old people. Evidently they belonged to Aunt Chou who wore them while working at the factory. He thought to himself, "These spectacles are worth something," so he put them into his pocket, and closed the case and put it back where he found it. He felt satisfied that their disappearance would never be discovered until the owner wanted to use them.

He again took up the sweetened crab apples which he enjoyed very much and he acted as if nothing had happened.

Aunt Chou returned with a broad smile, asking:

"Big-eyed Monkey, did you say you were going back to the farm tomorrow?"

"Yes, I'm taking the morning train."

"You and my son are in the same group, aren't you?"

"Yes, we are — otherwise I wouldn't know that he has been ill." Then Big-eyed Monkey thought to himself, "I must play a trick on this woman, because she still doesn't trust me." He got up and started to go, murmuring to himself, "Well, I still have to buy something for the farm." Addressing Aunt Chou, he added, "Auntie, I have got something to do before I go back. I'll see you again."

Aunt Chou stopped him, saying, "Why are you in such a hurry? Sit down for a while. You and our Chang-sheng are sworn brothers. You must look after him a bit."

"Oh! I am quite willing to do anything. It all depends on whether you people trust me." Big-eyed Monkey was a cunning boy and he purposely said this to force her to make up her mind.

Aunt Chou quickly interrupted him by saying, "Why shouldn't I trust you? Really I do — I do trust you, but you know it is not easy to save money." She took out a few bills as she said, "These ten yuan here are our four months' savings. Please give them to Chang-sheng and tell



him to buy something to eat during his convalescence. Tell him to take good care of himself. You'd better count them."

"Oh! It's not necessary to count them. I'll see that he gets them all right." Big-eyed Monkey put the money into his pocket. Aunt Chou had something more to say:

"Please tell Chang-sheng that his stepfather has changed. He has become a good man, otherwise how could we save money? Tell him not to be angry with his stepfather again. Ask him to write us a letter as soon as he has received the money. . . ."

Aunt Chou spoke quickly, but Big-eyed Monkey did not listen to anything the woman said or repeated. He nodded his head saying "yes" and "certainly" several times and then went out of the door on his way to the White Pavilion, to enjoy himself and have a good meal.

But things were different for Little Black Horse who was now in a miserable condition.

He went to the little inn where they used to live, but he could not find Big-eyed Monkey there. He also went to the recreational clubs, to the White Pavilion and several other places which they used to haunt before, but nowhere could Big-eyed Monkey be found. He tried begging again, but people said to him:

“How come there’s still a beggar around?”

“I am ashamed of you, such a young boy. You are not blind, nor a cripple. Why don’t you find some work to do?”

“Young man, go to the farm. There is lots of work to do and plenty to eat. Why choose to beg on the street?”

Little Black Horse was amazed by such remarks. The pancakes Uncle Niu had given him were finished long ago and he needed something to eat. The weather was extremely cold so he put on the coat which he was supposed to take to Niu Niu, but it did not help much to protect him from the cold. Each night, he crouched under the eaves of a house like a little dog, but he was bitterly cold just the same.

One early morning, the cold dew that moistened his thin clothes awakened him. He suddenly thought of his mother and the thought of her gave rise to a great yearning in his heart.

“No matter what happens, I have got to go and see her!”

The very idea kindled a fire within him that drove him quickly towards his old home, making him forget hunger and cold and run as fast as his legs would carry him until he perspired.

When he came to a place not very far from his home, he stopped. He hid himself behind a tele-

phone pole, looking in the direction of the house. At the window which was kept open he saw rows of cartons of cigarettes but nobody could be seen. After a while, a customer went to the window and someone appeared there. It was no other than his one-eyed stepfather. The sight of him reminded Little Black Horse of the days when his stepfather, drunk from liquor, would beat his mother and his sister and himself. A flame of hatred burned in him as he cursed:



“Selling cigarettes now? I thought you were dead a long time ago.”

Suddenly, the door of the outer room opened and a woman came out. She turned and closed the door. She had bobbed hair, wore a grey jacket and blue trousers and carried a lunch box in her hand. With her brows contracted, she wore a miserable look. She kept her head down as she walked along. Ha! Was it his mother? It was, but she did not look like his mother. His heart beat twice as fast within him. He did not know how to control himself, conflicting feelings fighting within him. He wanted

to go up to her, throw himself into her arms and weep bitterly for the agonies of the past few years and to let the tears wash away his suffering. At the same time he wanted to run far, far away, to the deep forest where nobody could find



him. Since his mother loved the one-eyed man and did not want her son, why should he still want his mother? In an instant, these two ideas fought each other in his mind. His face became pale and his breath short. Clinging to the pole without moving he did not know what to do.

His mother approached, walking with short steps and with her head down. She walked right past him.

“She hasn’t seen me. Did she purposely ignore me?” Little Black Horse looked at her mother’s back with painful thoughts running through his mind. Unconsciously, he followed his mother’s footsteps. He followed her to a tram stop and then only his eyes followed her as she got on a tram car.

As it went on, she seemed to cast a glance in his direction. Was it possible that she had not seen her own son with both eyes wide open?

The tram went on its way quickly. Little Black Horse kept looking at it for a long time until some pedestrian bumped against him and then he started to walk away. His steps became heavier and his heart sank deeper and deeper. A wave of shivering swept over him. Without his knowing it, he came to the side of the Haiho River where he chose a sunny but inconspicuous spot to lie down;

## 9. "He's Come Back!"

Little Black Horse did not know how long he slept there. He had all kinds of strange dreams. He dreamed of his one-eyed stepfather who raised a club to hit his mother and knocked her down on the ground. Her hair was spread out and she was crying out for help. He was hiding himself outside under the window; he saw it clearly. His patience finished, he dashed into the house, crying, "Hey! When I was a child, I had to stand your blows. Now I have grown up and it is my turn to give you a good beating." Before he had finished saying this,

he rushed upon his one-eyed stepfather and after an exchange of blows seized the club. One blow with the club knocked the one-eyed man down. He gave him another blow and the one-eyed man became motionless. He was as soft as a bag. "What's this? Have I killed him?" He put down the club and gave the man a push. It was not the one-eyed stepfather; it was a bag full of something. Prompted by curiosity, he opened the bag and was surprised to find that it was full of dates. For heaven's sake, he had been hungry for a number of days already and these dates were found just in time to satisfy his hunger. Just as he was enjoying these dates, a green-faced ghost ran up to him, "What a little shameless beggar! You dare to steal my dates. I will blow your brains out!" "Oh! What bad luck. Someone has caught me stealing things." He started to run away, but his two legs refused to carry him — they seemed to be nailed to the ground. His two shoulders were clutched by the ghost. He was trying to shake its hands off. In shaking them off, he awoke. He still felt someone shaking his shoulders and heard him saying to him:

"How come you're sleeping here?"

Little Black Horse opened his eyes but the sunshine was too strong for them. After a while when he opened them again, he found that the one who was shaking his shoulders was no other than

his captain from the farm — Liu Teh-shan.

The first thing that came to Little Black Horse's mind was Big-eyed Monkey's words: "You'll be shot or imprisoned." He was filled with fear and terror. "Run away, run away quickly! I mustn't let him get hold of me" was the first thought in his mind. He knew Liu Teh-shan was a cripple and could not overtake him. He got up quickly, but Liu Teh-shan stopped him immediately, saying:

"Ma Ping-erh, what are you going to do?"

In a panic, Little Black Horse gave the crippled man a push which knocked him to the ground. Little Black Horse started to run, but he was in such a hurry that he stepped right on Liu's travelling bag, lost his balance and tumbled over. Right beside him was a big muddy puddle and Little Black Horse fell right into it. "Oh, no! I've had it! This will be the end of me —"

This gave Liu Teh-shan time to overtake the boy. Instead of scolding him, he was very gentle and helped him to get up, saying:

"Hey! What's the matter with you? Did you hurt yourself?"

He helped Little Black Horse to get up and taking him to a wall, he sat down together with him there. Liu Teh-shan took out his handkerchief and as he wiped Little Black Horse's dirty, mud-covered face he said:

"You look like a black-nosed cat. Let's sit here and have a chat, shall we?"

Little Black Horse did not want to sit with him face to face and talk, so he turned his head away, sitting there without saying a word.

When he had discovered that Little Black Horse and Big-eyed Monkey had run away, Liu Teh-shan felt that he had not fulfilled the task entrusted to him by the Party and he was very distressed. When taking into consideration Big-eyed Monkey's birth, his past record, and his behaviour on the farm, he knew it would be comparatively difficult to reform him. That Big-eyed Monkey had run away from the farm was not very surprising to him. But that Little Black Horse had run away too was really quite unexpected. This boy had already made a nice beginning and showed marked improvement. Liu Teh-shan wished that he had paid more attention to the boy's education. He thought that if he had not left him alone in the tent during those difficult hours exposed to the bad influence of Big-eyed Monkey, then Little Black Horse would never have run away. This boy would certainly change. So now, when by chance he had found Little Black Horse, he was certainly glad. Although the boy had started to run away from him as soon as he had recognized him and had even pushed him on the ground, Liu Teh-shan



still had confidence that he could put the boy back on the right track. He said to himself, "To solve an ideological problem needs patience. To hurry won't do!" Then, he said kindly:

"Little Black Horse, why did you run away? Were you fed up with life on the farm? We are only just starting, you know. We are building up everything now. It takes time. In the beginning, everything is a bit difficult. When we get started, things will naturally improve. We must look to the future. The future holds good prospects for us. You know that is right?"

Little Black Horse was still silent.

"All of you boys are poor children. The old society never took any responsibility in looking after you, so you were driven to the streets to beg, hungry and cold. Many boys like you were frozen to death and nobody cared about them. Now in our new society, everyone has work to do and wants to work and nobody is starving. The People's Government has spent huge amounts of money to establish this farm for you boys to learn farm techniques and to attend cultural classes so that later on you will become useful citizens in the new society. Isn't this a good thing? Hasn't the government treated you well?"

Liu Teh-shan looked at Little Black Horse and noticed that the boy kept looking down on the

ground but there was no expression on his face. What was he thinking? He could not guess. Liu Teh-shan wished he could go into Little Black Horse's heart and find out what the boy was thinking about. To Liu Teh-shan, Little Black Horse had always seemed a clever but naughty boy, but how could he have become so stupid now? What else could he say? He was a bit worried. Now, gathering courage, he tried again.

"Ma Ping-erh, you know, that morning I returned to the farm with the flour cakes and fruits I promised you and also some pills for your sickness. I was told you two had run away. Immediately I went to the bank of the river and found your footprints. When I got to the broken bridge, I found one pair of larger footprints went westward. I wondered what had happened to the pair of smaller footprints. The three broken pieces of wood suggested to me that you might have been drowned in the water. What a terrible night that was! To tell you the truth, I didn't go to sleep the whole night. I felt that I had not done my work well. I had not given you enough attention. As for your ideological education, I hadn't done enough — far from enough. It was all my fault. What do you say?"

Liu Teh-shan was anxiously waiting for a reply. Little Black Horse turned his head down and

blinked his eyes a few times. It seemed to be in protest, but he put down his head again, still sitting there without a word.

Liu Teh-shan was very disappointed, saying to himself, "This boy is very obstinate. There seems to be no way to educate him."



With one hand on Little Black Horse's bony shoulder, he was still very patient and continued, "Since that night, each time I came to Tientsin I always made it a point after I had finished doing my business to look around on the streets with the hope that I would chance to meet you. Today, I did. How happy I am to have seen you! I didn't know that you would give me a push and knock me to the ground! Ma Ping-erh, can you distinguish between good and bad? I have talked a lot and you haven't even said 'yes' or 'no.' Are you deaf, dumb, or a fool?"

Little Black Horse dropped his head down

further till his chin was against his chest. It was so low that Liu Teh-shan could not see his expression at all. It seemed that Little Black Horse had made up his mind not to open his mouth and say anything. The more Liu Teh-shan talked, the more angry he became. He had never seen such an obstinate boy before. How strange he was! At last Liu Teh-shan could not control himself and he raised his voice, saying angrily:

“Ma Ping-erh, we have to make it clear to you. Don’t think we want to force you to work! If we wanted to recruit labourers, we would not be interested in you. The purpose of keeping boys like you on the farm is to reform and train them. If we wanted to make money, we would never pick such boys as you. Do you know how much money the government spends on each of you? Later on, we will have a large-scale mechanized farm. We can run it without you. I want to make this clear, so that if you want to go, you can. You don’t have to run, there is no need for that. I am a cripple. The enemy hit me and the bullet is still in my leg. I won’t be able to catch you. And why should I try? Even if I get hold of your arm, I can’t get hold of your heart — well, I have said what I wanted to say. You can go now!”

Little Black Horse did not make any move, nor did he show any signs of doing so. He sat there,

a little mud-covered urchin. Liu Teh-shan shook him angrily, pushed him and urged him to go. He sat there just the same, not moving at all.

Liu Teh-shan's heart became soft again and he found himself saying, "What is the matter with you?" Putting one arm around Little Black Horse, Liu Teh-shan used his other hand to raise the boy's chin. As the boy's head was raised, he looked into his face. Then, he saw that Little Black Horse's eyes were full of tears which ran down his cheeks rapidly, leaving two white lines on his thin dirty face.

"Why are you crying, you little fool?" At this, Little Black Horse wept all the more, sobbing bitterly, catching his breath between deep sobs. He wiped the tears with his dirty hand, which made him look like a painted beggar on the Chinese stage. Liu Teh-shan took out a handkerchief and wiped Little Black Horse's face for him, saying:

"Don't cry, my boy. Tell me if what I have said is true!"

Still sobbing, Little Black Horse nodded his head.

"Are you willing to go back to the farm with me?"

Little Black Horse again nodded.

"Then, why don't you say something?"

". . . . ."

Again, there was no reply. Then Liu Teh-shan purposely asked another question. "Do you wish to be a beggar again and loaf on the streets?"

Little Black Horse shook his head.

Liu Teh-shan was a little peeved because the boy wouldn't answer, but at the same time he smiled to himself, as he said:

"First you nod your head and then you shake your head. What's the use of your mouth? Speak up! Are you willing to go back to the farm with me and become a decent young workman?"

". . . . ."

"Come on, say it quickly."

"I'm willing," the voice was hardly audible.

Liu Teh-shan was overjoyed. He took Little Black Horse into his arms and held him tightly, murmuring:

"Your mouth has been so tightly shut but it doesn't matter. I know you are a clever boy and a brave one. You will understand things later on. Now, let's find a place to eat. Later, we'll go to the railway station."

After struggling hard with his lame leg, Liu Teh-shan raised himself up from the ground but Little Black Horse sprang up with a jump and took the bag on which he had stumbled an hour or so ago. Liu Teh-shan took the boy's hand and they

both started off to find a nearby restaurant. On the way, Liu Teh-shan asked Little Black Horse:

"Did you fall into the stream that night?"

"Yes, I did. I — nearly drowned."

"Little Black Horse, tell me honestly. Did you take the piece of material belonging to Captain Kao?"

"What was it? A suit length?" Little Black Horse faltered. "I never saw such a thing."

"If it wasn't you, then Big-eyed Monkey must have taken it."

"When we started, Big-eyed Monkey told me to leave the tent first. He came out afterwards. I didn't know what monkey business he was up to inside." Little Black Horse was getting excited now and he continued, "I swear I did not take Captain Kao's material."

Liu Teh-shan stopped him, saying, "Well, that's enough, there is no need to swear. I always believed Big-eyed Monkey stole it. What did he say to you when he was preparing to run away?"

"Oh! Don't talk about him!"

"Why?"

"He's a real rotter. If I see him again, I'll knock his brains out!"

"What for?"

This made a good start for Little Black Horse to tell the long story about everything that happened

when they ran away from the farm. He told Liu Teh-shan how Big-eyed Monkey had persuaded him to run away from the farm and how Big-eyed Monkey threatened him at the bridge, refused to give him a hand when he was in danger and how Uncle Niu had saved him. He was careful not to mention how he met his mother and saw the one-eyed man, for this was his well-guarded secret and a secret pain in his heart which he thought he would never be able to cure. He didn't mention this, but it was never absent from his mind. Whenever he thought of it, his heart unconsciously became heavy, but his mouth was sealed — sealed tightly.

Liu Teh-shan listened attentively as they walked slowly along the pavement. He had sympathy for what Little Black Horse had suffered, and at the same time as an educational worker he felt a sacred sense of responsibility for what had happened. He felt that Little Black Horse was still a child, but at the same time he was no longer a child. He said to himself: "This young fellow is no ordinary boy. It is not going to be a simple thing to help him, to educate him, to train him! — A few minutes ago, he was very straightforward — telling me everything. Now he is tongue-tied, not willing to say more. What is up with him now?"



But he did not try to get down to the root of the problem. He thought it was no use trying to be in a hurry. He must do things slowly. So he tried to crack a few jokes with Little Black Horse and tell him some interesting things. When they got to the door of the restaurant, he stole a glance at the boy who seemed to be quite happy again.

After they sat down at a table, Liu Teh-shan ordered a special dish for Little Black Horse together with four pieces of steamed bread and two bowls of noodles. Little Black Horse focused his eyes on the dish of sliced meat which the waiter brought to their table. He did not bother with chopsticks but just helped himself to the meat with his fingers. Liu Teh-shan stopped him, saying, "Why are you in such a hurry? Take it easy, Little Black Horse."

How could Little Black Horse take it easy when he was so hungry? He began to "swallow" the noodles as quickly as he could. Unfortunately, the hot soup and noodles burned his tongue. Tears came to his eyes from his burned tongue and because of the heat from the bowl of noodles. Liu Teh-shan had a real laugh at the way Little Black Horse acted at the table.

The boy finished everything in no time, but he still felt he hadn't had enough and wanted some more.

Liu Teh-shan refused to order any more for him, but instead he told him a story, which ran something like this: Long ago, there was a great poet who was very poor. Once, he did not have anything to eat for several days. His friends showed sympathy for him and gave him a present of two catties of beef. He was so hungry that he ate the meat at one meal. Then he died of overeating!

So, acting on Liu Teh-shan's advice, Little Black Horse did not persist in asking for more food. As a matter of fact, this meal certainly had a good effect on Little Black Horse who no longer felt his head was heavy. His legs became lighter and he was in high spirits now.

Little Black Horse carried the travelling bag for his crippled friend. They talked as they walked along. Little Black Horse was very happy to be going back to the farm again.

As soon as they entered the enclosure Little Black Horse was surprised to find that those saplings which had been blown down during the typhoon were standing erect again. It was late autumn, the leaves had begun to fall, but the branches seemed strong enough to stand the wind.

"Uncle Liu, are these the saplings which we planted?" Little Black Horse asked, wanting to



make sure.

“Indeed they are! It’s a good job we saved them from dying!”

Little Black Horse felt ashamed, especially for what he had done in the past.

As they walked along, the heart of Little Black Horse jumped with joy. He had never thought that a row of new houses would be standing in the place where formerly there was a heap of debris overgrown with weeds. The new houses were not complete yet and there were still a number of workmen working on them. Boys of the Youth Group were helping them by doing odds and ends. The glass windows were already in, and the houses looked very nice.

The boys of the Youth Group were really surprised at the appearance of Little Black Horse. Some were very enthusiastic and shouted, "See, Little Black Horse has come back!" "Little Black Horse, come over here!" "Little Black Horse, look at our new building. Isn't this a big house?"

Little Black Horse smiled back at them, nodding his head. Suddenly, he heard two boys who were certainly not making any complimentary remarks:

"Here comes the idler who eats and does nothing!"

"What a smart boy! When we had a hard time, he ran away. Now the new houses are nearly ready, he comes back."

Little Black Horse stole a glance at them. It was Erh Hsiao-tse and Sun Hsiao-pao who were carrying a basket of earth together. They talked as they walked. Little Black Horse was angry at their remarks. Ordinarily, he would have gone up and had a fight with them. He would have said, "What did you say? What do you mean by 'eating and doing nothing'?" But now, he knew he could not put up a strong argument. He had done something that had disgraced him in public. Therefore he just swallowed the insult and kept quiet. He glared at them, murmuring to himself, "You think you are pretty good. When I work, you are no match for me!"

He glared at them for some time, but they did not pay any attention. They carried the earth with a shout of "hey and ho" like grown-up people and walked away.

Little Black Horse was really angry and felt his face flush, although he did not utter a single word.

Captain Liu knew what was going on. He said in a low voice to Little Black Horse:

"Listen to me. If you work hard, you won't have to listen to such remarks or have a row with the others!" Then he raised his voice and addressed the boys, "Fellows, it's a good thing that Little Black Horse has come back. Nobody should gossip unkindly about him."

Erh Hsiao-tse turned his head, making a wry face.

Captain Liu called Niu Niu to him, and suggested:

"Since you two are great pals, Little Black Horse is going to join your team again. You are the team-leader so you must give him some help."

When the two boys stood beside each other, Captain Liu noted the difference right away. They showed a marked contrast; Little Black Horse was thinner and his skin was darker than before. But during his absence, Niu Niu had been well fed; he had a rosy face and his appearance was one of

real happiness. A deep compassion for Little Black Horse rose in the captain's heart, and he felt all the more unhappy about his former negligence.

Niu Niu took Little Black Horse's hands and asked intimately:

"What do you want to do now? In our team, we have some who carry the earth; some carry water and others help the masons carry mud —"

Little Black Horse had not quite got over his irritation yet and he quickly interrupted Niu Niu by saying, "Don't go on. Let me carry the earth."

"All right."

"Here you are. These are for you." Little Black Horse took off a pair of new shoes and put them on the ground. And then he took off the jacket he was wearing and also handed it to Niu Niu, apologizing, "Sorry, it is dirty now. By and by, I will wash it for you." As he said this, he took over the carrying pole from Niu Niu's hands. Urging him, he said, "Come on, let's go." Then he started off.

Niu Niu could not make out what it was all about — the jacket and the pair of shoes. Where did they come from? He looked at Captain Liu and started murmuring to himself, "What's happened? What is this all about?"

Captain Liu knew what kind of a boy Little Black Horse was. He smiled back to Niu Niu, as much as to say:

“Well, don’t bother about it now. You both go ahead with your work!”

## 10. Unity Is Strength

Little Black Horse always wanted very much to be top dog whenever he competed with others. It seemed that there was some force that drove him on.

While carrying the earth with Niu Niu, he kept complaining that they were carrying too little and walking too slow; he wanted to put more earth into the basket and run faster.

Niu Niu acted like a grown-up and as if he were a cadre. He would say, “That is enough now. You had better be careful and don’t put too much in the basket. Perhaps you can’t bear such a weight.”

“What? Do you think I am made of beancurd?” Little Black Horse would protest.

“Walk slowly. Be careful, or you’ll fall down!” Niu Niu advised.

“I am not blind, nor a cripple.”

Niu Niu again advised, “What we need to do is to work steadily. We don’t want to overburden ourselves today and then flop tomorrow — and not

even be able to get up. . . .”

Little Black Horse was getting impatient. He raised his voice, urging, “Come on, look at them! They have carried another basket.”

This challenging spirit of Little Black Horse put all the other boys on their mettle.

On one round, Little Black Horse and Niu Niu chanced to meet Erh Hsiao-tse and Sun Hsiao-pao on the way. Noticing that they only had half a basket of earth, Little Black Horse threw some ironical remarks at them. He presented them with an impromptu verse which he composed on the spot:

These two boys who've just gone past  
Boast of carrying dirt so fast.  
They are a very famous pair,  
But it seems to me they don't play fair!

They say I eat, but don't work very well,  
But the basket they carry is not half full.  
They also say I have no face at all,  
But their face is as thick as the city wall!

This drew laughter from all those who heard it. Erh Hsiao-tse and Sun Hsiao-pao who were unaccustomed to being held up as a laughing-stock were very embarrassed. They blushed and were speechless for a while. Then Sun Hsiao-pao said peevishly:



"We have carried baskets full of earth all the time. Only this one is half full yet he makes fun of us."

Erh Hsiao-tse also cried out: "He is a rotten egg. He starts making trouble as soon as he is back."

Niu Niu and Little Black Horse emptied the earth and came back with their empty basket. On the way, Little Black Horse whistled and swung his arm as he walked along. He saw the other two boys standing there in low spirits, almost in tears. He felt very happy himself and in an instant he



composed another verse for them:

To shiver with rage is a foolish thing,  
So let's compete and see who'll win.  
If I lose — your donkey I will be,  
You can ride on my back for all to see.  
But if you lose, I'll call you a hen.  
If you lay no eggs — I'll kill you then!

The other two boys could not take this. Sun Hsiao-pao threw off the carrying pole and squatted on the ground, actually crying.

Niu Niu criticized Little Black Horse, saying:

"The captain told us to be friendly to one another and develop mutual aid. Why did you say that to them?"

"I didn't swear at them."

"You said 'shivering with rage.' Why did you say that?"

"That is not swearing," Little Black Horse argued. His face was covered with dirt and sweat. He blinked his eyes comically.

"But you made fun at their expense and made Sun Hsiao-pao cry."

Erh Hsiao-tse picked up the carrying pole and stamped his feet heavily, saying, "Hsiao-pao, don't cry. Let's compete with them and see who will win. Don't worry about Little Black Horse. He doesn't have an extra pair of legs! He can't be one

hundred per cent sure he is really stronger than we are in carrying the earth!"

Sun Hsiao-pao wiped the tears from his face, saying, "If we lose, he will call us 'hens.' What then?"

"How do you know we will lose? If they lose, we will call him a 'donkey' and then we can ride on his back."

Hsiao-pao stopped crying. He took over the carrying pole and walked away.

The competition began. Erh Hsiao-tse's group carried more than before. Little Black Horse's group also put more earth into their basket. Little Black Horse's group walked fast; Erh Hsiao-tse's group walked faster. Both groups walked under a heavier load which gave their shoulders a real test. Each was working hard to beat the other and neither succeeded in winning. Just at this time the whistle blew. Little Black Horse said, "We draw a tie today. Let's call it off now. Tomorrow we'll try again."

That evening, they enjoyed a good meal which consisted of millet bread with fish. To Little Black Horse, it was a special treat because it was a long time since he had eaten them. At mealtime, Erh Hsiao-tse and Sun Hsiao-pao came over to Little Black Horse with a smile on their faces and asked him:

"Little Black Horse, do you know where we got the fish?"

Little Black Horse was clever enough to know that these two boys really wanted to make some trouble and therefore he replied: "I am not the business manager. How do I know where you got the fish."

Well prepared beforehand, Erh Hsiao-tse and Sun Hsiao-pao then started talking together, one asking questions and the other answering.

"Did the fish drop down from the sky?"

"No, there are only clouds in the sky. How can there be fish in the clouds?"

"Did the fish spring up from the earth?"

"No. How can you find fish in the earth?"

"Was the fish bought in Lutai?"

"No. That costs money, a great deal of money."

"Then, how did we get them?"

"The boys got the fish from the river. It is the fruit of our labour."

Erh Hsiao-tse winked and said triumphantly: "Little Black Horse, how much fish did you catch?"

Little Black Horse was not prepared for this. He was stunned; he could not give a reply offhand.

Erh Hsiao-tse then continued, "Do you remember the statement which says 'If you don't work, you should not eat'? You haven't caught a single fish, how can you squat here and enjoy

eating it? It means you eat but don't work."

Little Black Horse's face flushed instantly. He felt he was covered over with red paint. He put down his chopsticks and bowl, and walked away. Niu Niu called after him:

"Little Black Horse, come back. You can also give us your opinion. You can tell them what you think about it."

But Little Black Horse did not even turn his head.

Niu Niu blamed Erh Hsiao-tse and Sun Hsiao-pao, "You two are just looking for trouble. You were right when you said that the fish we were eating were caught by ourselves, but what about the other things? Did you grind the millet you were eating? Did you plant it?"

Other boys in the group also joined in the debate and gave them a few kicks in the back. "Did you chop trees for fuel from the mountains?" "Did you make the salt yourselves?" they asked.

These questions put Erh Hsiao-tse and Sun Hsiao-pao on the spot and they were unable to defend themselves. Erh Hsiao-tse asked, "Why did he compose those verses to make fun of us?"

Niu Niu replied in a serious way: "What he did was not right. We will ask him to criticize himself. The way you acted in retaliation was also not right. You will have to criticize yourselves also."

Erh Hsiao-tse made another grimace and pulled Sun Hsiao-pao a little; they both walked away.

Niu Niu did not feel like going on with his meal. Immediately he went to Captain Liu's tent and made a report of what had happened.

When Liu Teh-shan was informed of the incident, he found it a bit of a headache to deal with.

"Aiya, this naughty boy. This is his first day back on the farm and he has to cause trouble. Then he goes off without eating." After a second thought, he continued, "Niu Niu, you go and have a talk with Erh Hsiao-tse and Sun Hsiao-pao and ask them to take the initiative in patching up the quarrel with Little Black Horse. Tell them we of the Youth Group are one unit; we live the collective life of one family. He who does his best in promoting a fraternal spirit of unity shall be highly commended. Those who swear at people and sow seeds of disunity will be criticized. I'll go and find Ma Ping-crh." Niu Niu walked away to carry out his instructions.

Liu Teh-shan went to several places but could not find Little Black Horse.

"Is it possible that he could not stand this teasing and has run away again?"

Liu Teh-shan limped along slowly till he came out to the dyke. He followed the dyke and looked everywhere. He finally came to a bend in the

stream where he found Little Black Horse. Stripped of nearly everything except his shorts, Little Black Horse was standing in the middle of the stream digging with a spade. What was he digging for, Liu Teh-shan wondered.

"What are you doing there, Little Black Horse?" Liu Teh-shan shouted.

Smiling happily, Little Black Horse answered Liu Teh-shan, "I am digging for fish."

"Don't be ridiculous! How can you catch fish by digging?"

"Oh! Sure, I can catch fish by digging," Little Black Horse replied with confidence. "I have a plan. You just sit down and see!"



“Stop digging! Put on your clothes.”

“No, I am not cold. You see I have perspiration all over my face.”

“I order you to stop! Stop it at once! Put on your clothes. I want to talk to you. Do you want to disobey my instructions?”

Little Black Horse had to stop. He put down the spade and put on his new cotton-padded vest. He came up to the captain.

Liu Teh-shan sat on a ridge in the field and told Little Black Horse to sit down beside him, saying:

“What did I tell you? I told you not to pick a quarrel with your comrades. Did you do as I told you?”

With a smile, Little Black Horse played with his bare feet, keeping silent.

“Speak out!”

“I didn’t start it.”

“Who did then?”

“They provoked me first.”

“They started first. That was their fault, but you pulled their legs. You were also wrong. It seems that both of you are equally wrong, doesn’t it?”

“ . . . . . ”

“Did you get permission to come out here? Do you know that boys of the Youth Group have to obey the rules and regulations?”

“They said —”



"Don't talk about 'they.' I know everything. You just talk about yourself."

"I am wrong. I won't do it again, Uncle Liu," whispered Little Black Horse in a low voice, looking down at his bare feet.

Liu Teh-shan felt very happy to see that this time Little Black Horse was more willing to accept his criticism. Then he switched over to another topic.

"Well, let's hear about your plan for digging up the fish."

Little Black Horse became lively again.

"You see, Captain, we have a fishing net but no boat. We can't catch many fish by standing on the shore. I wanted to dig a ditch and lead water into it. We will put some bait in the ditch so that the fish will come in after it. Then we will close the ditch and drain the water out. Isn't that a good idea to catch a great number of fish?"

Liu Teh-shan laughed to himself, thinking, "This young fellow can use his brains," but he deliberately drew a long face and said in a serious way:

"It means a big construction job. When do you figure you will have the digging finished?"

"By bedtime —"

"Well, that's not a good idea. Don't you know we have a class in the evening? Did you plan to miss the class? They have finished half of the textbook 'Reading Lessons for Workers,' but you have

only had a few lessons. How do you plan to catch up?"

"Can't I go to bed a little late?"

"Didn't we just say we have to obey the rules and regulations?"

"Then, can't I come to do the digging before working hours start?"

"No, before working hours we have drill."

"Good heavens! Before working hours, there is drill. In the evening, we have classes. If I give up a few hours' sleep, that is against the rules and regulations. Then my plans have gone on the rocks — how can I carry them out!"

"Listen, Ma Ping-erh, who is that singing?"

As he listened, he knew that it was certainly a well-trained chorus singing "Unity Is Strength." It became louder as they came nearer and nearer. Suddenly, a group of boys appeared, carrying fishing poles, fishing nets, small boxes containing fish bait, fish traps, and baskets for carrying fish. They were the boys of the Youth Group. He became uneasy and entreated:

"Uncle Liu, please let me go away now."

"What for?"

"They will laugh at me."

"No, you don't have to run away." Liu Teh-shan stood up and then he raised his voice, shouting

to the boys with his two hands put together to make a loudspeaker.

"Hey, boys, come over here."

When they spotted their captain calling them, the boys ran over quickly.

Very mildly, Liu Teh-shan asked Little Black Horse, with a smile on his face:

"Say, young fellow, can you sing 'Unity Is Strength'? I know you can't, but you should learn. You are clever and can use your brains, but you are always interested in working by yourself. Just see how big this construction work is! If you try to dig alone, you won't finish it in ten days or even half a month. We are now building socialism together, so why do you always try to do things by yourself?"

Little Black Horse scratched his head, laughing aloud.

When everybody had arrived, Liu Teh-shan told them about Little Black Horse's plan of digging a ditch for catching fish. Some expressed their approval; some doubted it. Niu Niu said:

"I am in favour of this idea, but the question is: This is not a good place, and there are not many fish. Also it's a difficult place to dig in."

"Right," Erh Hsiao-tse shouted enthusiastically. "Why should we dig a ditch here? The stream has a branch-off a little distance from here. All we

have to do is to block up both ends. Ha, ha, it's all ready-made."

"Good idea," all the boys shouted and clapped their hands.

Little Black Horse forgot that he had ever had a row with Erh Hsiao-tse. He also felt enthusiastic and clapped his hands. "Very good, indeed. This will save us a lot of trouble. Let's go and have a look, Erh Hsiao-tse."

The two boys ran over hand in hand.

Liu Teh-shan said, "Niu Niu, go quickly and send a few boys back at once to get some tools."

Niu Niu then asked a few who could run fast to get the tools. The rest of the boys followed Erh Hsiao-tse and Little Black Horse to the branch-off in the stream, where they discussed how to block up the two ends. Little Black Horse said:

"I think we had better not wait for the implements. It wastes time. There are plenty of stones around. We can start collecting stones and block it here."

Sun Hsiao-pao asked, "Shall we block up the upper end first? Or the lower end?"

Little Black Horse answered hastily, "Both ends."

"That won't do," interrupted Liu Teh-shan. "We don't have enough hands to block both ends at the same time and if we cannot succeed in doing it, the fish will all be frightened away. I would rather

start with the lower end first. What do you fellows say?"

Everybody agreed and started work at once. The stream was neither wide, nor deep. The stones that were thrown into it splashed water all over the boys. By this time, the sun had already gone down behind the hills, and the breeze that came across the plain and the water in the stream were both quite chilly, but the boys were very happy and enthusiastic in doing the work. When Little Black Horse saw that Liu Teh-shan was also carrying stones, he shouted:

"Uncle Liu, your legs can't stand the weight. Be careful — don't fall into the water!"

"Don't worry. I'll be careful."

Niu Niu said, "You'd better stop. If every one of us carries one more stone, that will come to more than what you can carry."

Liu Teh-shan did not want to stop and persisted in doing the work with the boys. Finally they all agreed to let him carry stones on the shore but not in the water.

The boys who were sent back to get implements arrived with all sorts of things — carrying poles, pails, washing basins, and so on. Of the implements, pails were not used, because by the time they had blocked up the lower end it was already dark. The moon was now hanging in the sky like a bow

and the stars were twinkling. Everybody stopped; they had to hurry back to attend the evening class. On the way back, Erh Hsiao-tse remembered what Niu Niu had said to him. Therefore he took the initiative in taking Little Black Horse and Sun Hsiao-pao by their hands as they walked along. Smiling he said to Little Black Horse:

"Sorry I offended you. What I said was very impolite."

Sun Hsiao-pao followed with, "I am also sorry for my behaviour. I shouldn't have said that 'you eat and do nothing.'"

Their modesty and willingness to criticize themselves made Little Black Horse very uneasy. He imitated the way they had spoken and replied, "Ai-ya, I — I am also sorry for what I did. I shouldn't have made up those verses to embarrass you."



Erh Hsiao-tse shook hands with Little Black Horse and said, "That is enough. We are all square now. If it hadn't been for this we wouldn't have become friends. Now we have become better friends. Little Black Horse, from now on I will help you with your lessons. My marks for reading are always a 'four' or 'five.' "

Niu Niu who walked behind caught up and interrupted by saying, "I'll help you with your arithmetic. I only got one 'four,' the rest were all 'five.' "

"Then what can I do to help him?" Sun Hsiao-pao shouted, "Well, I am good at playing football. I'll teach you to play football. We have just bought a new football and have recently levelled the football ground."

Erh Hsiao-tse then joked with him, "Oh, that is enough, you little devil. You also want to be a teacher. Sometimes it's hard to tell whether you are playing with the ball or the ball is playing with you."

This drew a hearty laugh from all those who heard it. Liu Teh-shan who had heard all the conversation felt very satisfied and happy. "What a fine bunch of boys they really are!" he said to himself. He felt that if he told them the right things and led them on the right path and watched them grow in a healthy way, it would mean great happiness for him.

The second afternoon after supper, they went again to block up the upper end of the stream. The third day at the same time, they went there with all sorts of implements that would hold water — water tubs, water basins, jugs, rice bowls, tea pots. The draining of the water started immediately and at last it was all drained out. The fish which were marooned in the mud, leaping and crowding together, were so many that counting was impossible. All the children raised a cry of joy, shouting, running, and busily putting the fish into bags. Fine! They had killed two birds with one stone. They could save money and at the same time improve their food and their life. They could not eat such a big quantity in a short time, so they decided to salt them; that way, they could eat fish for a long time. •

## 11. “Lovesick”

Not long afterwards, some of the new houses were ready for occupation. The doors were painted; the insides were whitewashed. Only the *kangs*\*

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\* A *kang* is used as a bed in North China, usually built with clay or brick. In winter it is warmed by the flues from a fire.



were not dry yet. For fear that the weather was too cold for the boys who were still living in the tents, the superintendent gave instructions that someone was to see that a fire was made inside the *kangs* every day and he himself went there to see them every evening. He also felt the *kangs* with his own hands to make sure that they were dry enough. He gave instructions that the boys of the Youth Group were to move into the new houses first; he and all other members of the staff were still to live in the temporary matshed buildings.

The boys were all very enthusiastic on the day they moved. They washed all their dirty clothes and socks. They took down the tents with which they were already fed up. They laughed happily as they moved into the new houses, arguing and discussing everything.

"Hey! I never imagined that one day we little beggars would live in such beautiful houses!"

"You know, I always thought that such a nice whitewashed house with a nicely laid-out *kang* had been prepared for the superintendent, but it has turned out to be ours! Goody! Goody! I never thought this would be for us!"

"This is the new society. If it were still in the old days, nobody would give a damn about us, let alone provide us with living quarters."

When the moving was finished, Erh Hsiao-tse

sat on the *kang* to take a look at the new house. Everything was laid out neatly and nicely on it. Their wash towels were hanging from a line specially prepared for the purpose and all the articles of daily use were placed in good order. He turned his head to all directions admiring everything.

"Our house certainly is a beautiful one, but the walls look too blank. There is not a single picture hanging on them. What a pity!"

"No pictures! Never mind. We can draw some ourselves!" Little Black Horse felt very energetic. "Who has drawing pencils?"

"I have some," replied one boy called Hsiao Lo as he took out a few crayons. "What shall we draw?"

"First we'll draw the sun," Little Black Horse suggested. "Chairman Mao is like the sun. Since we can't draw a picture of Chairman Mao very well, we'll draw a sun to represent him. Who can draw a sun?"

"I can," Hsiao-pao jumped up and came over.

"You must draw the sun high up on the wall. You are not tall enough, you can't reach it."

"Never mind. I can do it. Someone can hold me up!"

Then Niu Niu stood on the *kang* and held up Hsiao-pao who used a red pencil to draw a sun on

the whitewashed wall. Carefully he drew a big circle from the circumference of which radiated long and short rays of light.

"We have a new house and we should have a picture of it. Who can draw a house?" Little Black Horse asked again.

"Just see what I can do!" Erh Hsiao-tse spoke loudly standing on the *kang* too.

"We have planted so many trees. Who can draw trees?"

And so it went on. They drew a sun, a house, trees, people — babies, fish, frogs, aeroplanes, steamers. Beside the *kang* stood a row of boys who all tried to do their best drawings. Very quickly, the whitewashed wall became a mess covered with all sorts of drawings.

At the height of their enthusiasm, suddenly the door creaked, and someone asked abruptly:

"What are you doing here?"

Everybody turned to the door where the superintendent stood with an angry frowning face. It was easy to see that he was doing his best to keep his emotions under control, but the boys were really



frightened. Ordinarily, they were used to working together with the superintendent, chatting with him and he always had a smile on his face; they had never seen him so furious before.

"Boys, you just think of it! What have you done to the walls — you've mutilated them!" He pointed to the walls with his hand. Little Black Horse stole a glance at them. They certainly were a sight! On a tree there was a steamer. A crooked house stood as if about to fall down. The tree didn't look like a tree because it had circles for the leaves. . . . Sure enough, it was very ugly looking. The superintendent said angrily:

"Do you know how much we have spent on these houses? What hard work it was to build them? If a door was not fixed properly, we had to take it off and do it again. All the material was sent here from far-off places. For fear that you boys could not stand the cold weather, we have burned a great deal of fuel to dry up the *kangs*, so that you could move in earlier. We grown-ups are still living in the matsheds. Now see what a mess you have made of the house. You don't seem to know how to take care of public property! We have spent a great deal of money. We haven't started to pay back to the government even a grain of foodstuff yet and now you see what you have done to the house. Don't you feel ashamed of yourselves?"

The atmosphere in the room was tense. The boys did not know what to do, everyone looked at the other and kept silent.

"Honestly, boys, you should stand up and confess your faults. Who started this first?" The superintendent threw a sweeping glance at the boys from one to another.

"I did," Little Black Horse stood up, feeling very sorry about it. "I made the suggestion. I told them to draw pictures, Superintendent. You must punish me for this."

"No, I started first. I ought to be punished." Erh Hsiao-tse also stood up to make his confession.

Sun Hsiao-pao being a bit of a coward said timidly, in a low voice, "I drew the picture of the sun."

"I drew the trees," said someone else.

"I did the frogs."

"I did the babies."

Everyone confessed. The superintendent found out that every one of the ten boys in the room had taken part in the mischief. Now, all of them stood there with their heads down low and their spirits even lower and therefore the superintendent changed his tone and manner of talking to them.

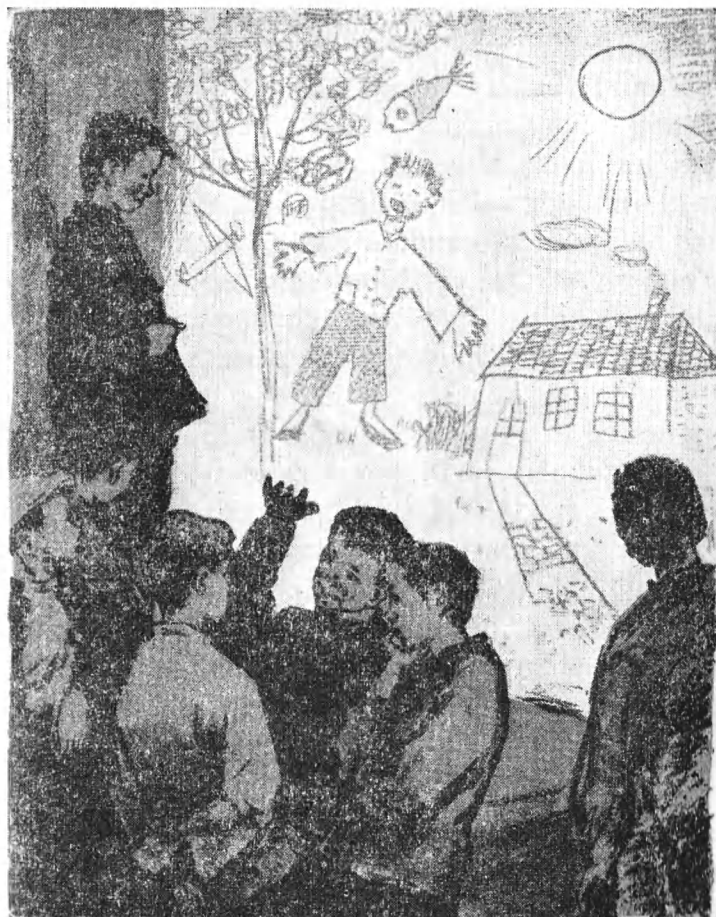
"Boys, the farm belongs to all of us; it belongs to the whole people. Everything on this farm, even a tree, should be well protected. Don't you know

that we are supposed to take good care of public property? What did you boys do today? Well, I am not going to punish you for what you have done this time, but I want all of you to remember and, if you think it's right, keep it always in mind. Now you think what you are going to do about the walls!" He turned and as he was going, he discovered that the window was open. It was not hooked up. The superintendent was annoyed again, saying:

"Look here! Why wasn't the window hooked up? If the wind comes, the glass will be smashed to pieces. Do you know how much it will cost us to buy a new piece of glass from Tientsin for the window? I have told you many, many times. Why can't you remember?"

After having carefully hooked the windows on both sides, he took another glance around the room, and then walked away with his hands behind his back.

After the departure of the superintendent, all the boys began to wash the walls. Now they knew it was much easier to draw the pictures than to remove them. The longer they washed, the dirtier the walls became. Now they were uglier than when the pictures were on them, but it was already too late. They discussed it and decided to ask Uncle Liu Teh-shan to help them solve this difficult







problem. He finally managed to get them some whitewash which several boys used carefully to wash over the walls again.

This was a great lesson to the boys which taught them always to bear in mind that public property must be taken care of. After that, if anyone opened the windows and forgot to hook them up, or damaged a work implement, or drew a picture in a textbook, or spat on the ground, there would be someone who would immediately say, "Why don't you take care of public property?" Or, "Do you remember the rules and regulations regarding public property?"

After another few days, another row of buildings were ready for occupation. These included warehouses, dining-rooms, offices, and two big rooms which had no walls on two sides and which they called the "mysterious house." Captain Liu said they were going to put the tractor in this shed. The term "tractor" was a great mystery as well as attraction to the boys, none of whom had ever seen one.

The tractor finally arrived late one afternoon. All the boys of the Youth Group followed the superintendent and the cadres to welcome the newcomers. Besides the tractor, many other machines had arrived. These included the seeding and harvesting machines, the names of which they

did not know. Every one of the crew of the tractor team wore a canvas overall and a workman's cap, with a towel around the neck. Some sat in the cabin while driving the machine; some under an umbrella. It was really an amazing sight.

To the boys, the most respected and admired person was Captain Chen of the tractor team. He was a young man of little more than 20, with a reddish face and a few freckles, and his hair, which he divided in the middle, was always hanging a little over his forehead. He had a fine physique with well-developed muscles. Every day he took the tractor team to the fields to do the autumn ploughing. After work, he talked to the superintendent and cadres in front of the tractor sheds on the construction of the tractor and the method of driving it. He talked eloquently, explained and answered all the questions put to him satisfactorily. When he sat on the machine, he had such a thorough knowledge of the switches and buttons and manipulated them so perfectly and easily that all the boys considered him to be the best learned and ablest person that they knew.

Since the arrival of the tractor team, Little Black Horse, Niu Niu, Erh Hsiao-tse and a few other boys of the Youth Group stopped their football games; they stopped reading the children's picture books, catching crabs and other such boyish activi-

ties. They centred all their interest on the tractor team and that strong young captain. Every evening, as soon as they had finished supper, they ran over to that space in front of the tractor shed and before the superintendent and all the cadres arrived they walked round and round the tractor or put out their hands to feel the wheels or cast a covetous glance at the cabin, all of which gave them extreme pleasure.

After the superintendent and the other cadres had arrived, Captain Chen would start his talk; he did it steadily, never too fast and never too slow. Sometimes he drew a picture; sometimes he wrote a few characters; sometimes he went into the cabin and pointed to this and that — this was the most interesting time for the listeners, but it was also the time which Little Black Horse and the other boys disliked. This was because when the lecturer referred in his talk to certain things in the cabin and pointed out these parts to the listeners, they all crowded together at the narrow entrance to the cabin and of course, the boys who did not want to lose this chance also tried hard to elbow their way into the crowd hoping to have a look at the objects. Some cadres were not satisfied with this, especially one fellow called Chang, who was chief of the production section. He was recently transferred to the farm, and since he had been there he had looked

down upon the boys. When they were not around, he called them "dirty little beggars" and "little paupers." During the lecture hours, his aversion to the boys became greater than ever. These boys worked hard every day, but they did not have enough spare clothes to change very frequently and so it was unavoidable that some of them smelled a little of dirt and perspiration. The production chief disliked the unpleasant odour and as he frowned he put his white handkerchief over his nose. He raised his voice and said to them, "Go away, you boys. Go and catch your crabs. This is no place for you! What confusion it makes to have these dirty boys edging in and out! How can we learn anything this way?"

His sneers and discrimination did not dampen the enthusiasm of the boys who were interested in these talks on the tractor just the same.

One time, Little Black Horse was clever enough to stand on the step at the door of the tractor long before the talk started. He stayed at the door and waited. Captain Chen talked quite a while in front of the tractor and then got into the cabin to give a demonstration. As usual, everybody struggled to get to the door to have a look. Little Black Horse already occupied a good place where he could see everything clearly. He had never realized that his presence prevented Chief Chang from seeing

anything. Standing closely behind Little Black Horse, Chang thought that "this little beggar" should pay him respect by letting him go to the front to see better. But since Little Black Horse did not move, Chang shouted:

"Hey, you little devil! Make way! I can't see a thing."

Little Black Horse was stretching his neck and was keenly interested in the demonstration; he heard nothing of what Chang had said. Chang pulled at the boy's clothes to drag Little Black Horse out of the crowd. Little Black Horse did not move simply because all his attention was concentrated on the demonstration. Neither did he feel anything, no matter how hard Chang pulled him. Then Chang lost his temper and began to swear at Little Black Horse.



"You bloody fool! What can you understand? What do you come here for? To make trouble?"

Little Black Horse heard the chief of the production section this time and he was ablaze with indignation. He turned his face, raising his two fists, and said in a low voice:

"Say, you'll have to be careful about your tongue. We boys are not allowed to use dirty language. You as chief shouldn't swear at people. If you do it again, I'll gather all the boys together and we'll have a discussion about it, to see whether you can get away with it. You had better be careful."

Fearing that the boys would start a quarrel with him, the man dared not speak again. He gave up altogether, and went to the side to enjoy a smoke.

After the incident, Niu Niu, Erh Hsiao-tse and the other boys congratulated Little Black Horse for his brave action, because he had said something to this man for whom they had held a grudge in their hearts for so long.

After a few days, talks on the use of the seeder commenced. The superintendent told Liu Teh-shan that he wanted more than a dozen boys to help with the tractor team. Behind each seeder, three or four boys were to look after the funnels. If seeds did not come out from the funnels properly, the boys who followed the machine had to shake them with iron bars. Little Black Horse was intensely delight-

ed. Everybody fought to register and the boys who were most enthusiastic were Little Black Horse, Niu Niu and Erh Hsiao-tse who said:

“To be an assistant in the tractor team is not a simple thing.”

“You have to know a lot, for an assistant now might be an operator afterwards!”

“We have to show we know something. We must not let people look down on us!” they said to each other.

These little “assistants” were really enthusiastic. If the machine driver wanted water, they would carry two buckets to the stream to get it for him. If he wanted petrol, they would immediately go to the warehouse to get it. When the outside of a tractor was splashed with water and mud, the boys would wash it clean and wipe it with cloth. If it was necessary to have someone go under a machine to help fix a part, no one would refuse to do it regardless of dirt or difficulty. Alert, intelligent and quick in their movements, they always responded at once whenever work needed to be done. What they did won hearty applause from the crew of the tractor team. But the captain of the tractor team repeated his instructions time and again that the boys of the Youth Group could do whatever work was needed, but that none of them was allowed to enter the driver’s cabin or touch anything inside the

cabin. But this was something all the children were anxiously looking forward to doing some day.

What Little Black Horse thought about to himself day and night was how to drive a tractor. Secretly, he learned to remember the names of the different parts of the machine and how to operate them. If only he were allowed, he could take the tractor to the field for a run! But the question was: when would he be allowed to drive it? He asked Uncle Liu, in fact, begged him and gave him pledges that he would take good care of the machine, but Uncle Liu only patted his shaved head and smiled as he said:

“Young man, why are you in such a hurry? You are still young. When you grow up, certainly you will be a tractor driver.”

“But I have already learned how to operate it. You can let me try once if you don’t believe me.”

Yet no matter how often he asked, Uncle Liu would never let him do it. His replies were always more or less the same.

One day, Liu Teh-shan called Little Black Horse and Niu Niu to him and gave them a “good job.” Lao Chang, the warehouse keeper, was rushed to hospital for an operation. They were told to move to the warehouse and to look after it temporarily. There was petrol in the warehouse and next to it was the “mysterious house” in which all the ma-



chines were parked. Therefore this work was very important. They were asked if they were willing to do it. Both said in unison, "We promise we'll do our job well."

That night, Little Black Horse said that they should take precautions against the sabotage of enemy agents and so he and Niu Niu took Comrade Lao Chang's lantern and patrolled the "mysterious house" for a long time. All the vehicles were locked and nobody could start the machines, but as protectors of the place it was also a fascinating thing to openly make their rounds of the house, take a look here and there, smell the odour of the petrol, and feel the smooth bodies of the various machines.

After returning to the warehouse, Little Black Horse could not go to sleep for a long time. He was thinking of driving a tractor and was spellbound by the idea. As soon as he had gone to sleep, he dreamed he was actually a tractor driver. He dreamed that he and the crew of the tractor team wore the same kind of canvas overalls and the same kind of workman's cap with a white towel around his neck. He also drove a tractor. Ah, this really satisfied his long-hoped-for aspirations. He drove the machine over a ditch and he took it across a river. He drove on and on and suddenly the machine lifted itself up from the ground as if it were an aeroplane flying in the air. Aiya, his work-

man's cap blew away, the white towel also blew off, all that surrounded him were the floating clouds and the sickle moon which was near at hand. The little stars that spread out in the sky kept winking and they were so many that he could not count them. How beautiful they were! Then an idea came to him, "Why am I driving the tractor in the sky? Do I want to sow seeds in the sky? Come down quickly! But what part of the machine should I manipulate in order to take the tractor down? Which gear should I use?" Good lord, he just didn't know. Beads of perspiration shone on his face as he shouted, "Captain, to drive downward, which gear should I apply?" This shout awakened him. Lying beside him, Niu Niu pushed him, saying, "Use the reverse gear!" Niu Niu did not go to sleep at all, because he was also thinking of how to drive a tractor. Little Black Horse sat up quickly and answered him, in a dreamy way, "No, the reverse gear will take you backward."

"Sure, that's the function of a reverse gear."

"I did not want to go backward. What I wanted to do was to fly down."

"Why fly? It isn't an aeroplane."

Little Black Horse was now wide awake. He also laughed at himself. He told Niu Niu the whole story which made the latter laugh so heartily that he had to hold his sides.

People said that Little Black Horse was "love-sick," and that he was head over heels in love with the tractor.

## 12. Triumph

Since Little Black Horse's mother, Aunt Chou, had met Big-eyed Monkey and had learned of her son's sickness, she thought of him all the time. Because of the loss of her spectacles that day, her husband, Chou Pao-cheng, suspected Big-eyed Monkey to be a swindler, but Aunt Chou would not believe it. "Stealing has nothing to do with it. If he just wanted to cheat us, how would he know that there is a Lutai State Farm? How could he make up such a story?" They argued about this quite often. When they had finished making the cotton-padded clothes in the factory, Aunt Chou asked for three days' leave. She wanted to see her son with Lao Wang who was to deliver the cotton-padded clothes to the Lutai State Farm.

One afternoon, two carts, each carrying a full load of cotton-padded clothes, went rolling through the farm gates.

When they arrived there, Aunt Chou immediately

jumped down from one of the carts and, as she was in a hurry to find out the whereabouts of her son, she asked the old man in the inquiry office if he knew her son Ma Chang-sheng who was in the Youth Group. The old man said that there were many boys in the Youth Group. He himself was a newcomer. He didn't know which was which. He told her to go on and look for him herself.

The farm was so big. She came to an office, in which there was a cadre who, with a cigarette in his mouth and a pair of spectacles on his nose, sat in front of a desk. She asked him:

"Comrade, please tell me. Do you have a boy called Ma Chang-sheng here?"

The man looked up and threw a glance at Aunt Chou over the frame of his spectacles. He was impatient and waved his hand.

"Don't know — don't know. Go somewhere else and ask."

After saying this, he buried his head among a pile of files and dismissed her from his mind. Aunt Chou felt embarrassed. If she asked again, she was afraid that she would disturb other people in their work. If she didn't ask again, how could she find her son? She hesitated for a while and gathered enough courage to try once more.

"Comrade, I'm sorry I must trouble you just a moment. Ma Chang-sheng is my son. He is one of

the Youth Group. Do you know him or not?"

"The Youth Group?"

"Yes, yes," Aunt Chou saw a little hope then and asked, "Do you know him? He is 15 now."

The man she spoke to happened to be the chief of the production section who had once had a row with Little Black Horse. He had always looked down on the Youth Group. He felt that the farm was simply feeding a batch of beggars and little thieves and that it was like throwing money into the water. Any mention of the Youth Group created an unfavourable reaction in his mind. He shook his head so terribly that his spectacles nearly dropped off. Angrily he replied:

"I don't know any of those little devils in the Youth Group!"

Aunt Chou was quite disheartened by such a remark, but she did not give up, and asked again, "Even if you don't, there must be someone who does. Please tell me where I can go and inquire about it. I have come down all the way from Tientsin — so far away. I can't go back yet."

But the fellow put his head down again.

Aunt Chou was angry. She raised her voice and said:

"Hey! Comrade, what about it?"

"You want to make trouble?" yelled Chief Chang, throwing down his pen. He lost his temper and

shouted at her, "This is an office. What the hell!"

"You just tell me where to go and ask. It won't cost you anything. The leading cadres in Tientsin don't act like this . . . you . . . what kind of attitude is this?"

This chief was a bureaucrat who knew how to bully good-hearted persons and how to act humbly in front of others. As soon as he saw Aunt Chou was the kind of woman who would stand no nonsense, he became more polite. Frowning, he said, "All right. If you want to find people, go to the personnel office. Don't make a fuss here."

"Then, where is the personnel office?"

He pointed in its direction.

Aunt Chou immediately left the office and after making inquiries in one place after the other, finally found the personnel office. There was a woman cadre there who was very polite and listened attentively to her. She went through all the registers but could not find anyone called Ma Changsheng.

Aunt Chou looked very disappointed and doubts arose in her mind. She thought:

"Is Big-eyed Monkey a real swindler then? Were those all made-up stories he told me? But that couldn't be — he must have been to this farm, otherwise he wouldn't even know there was a Youth Group on the farm — that's for sure." When she

thought of this, there seemed to be new hope for her. She quickly asked again:

“Comrade, it was Big-eyed Monkey who told me about my son. Big-eyed Monkey and my son are both in the Youth Group. You look up Big-eyed Monkey’s name. If you find him, you will find my son.”

“Is ‘Big-eyed Monkey’ the nickname of a boy?” the woman cadre asked hesitantly. “We don’t put down the nicknames. Do you know his real name?”

“People just call him Big-eyed Monkey. Who knows his real name?”

“Then, there is no way to find out,” the woman cadre said, feeling very sorry. She sympathized with Aunt Chou whose eyes now were beginning to get wet with unshed tears. An idea came to her mind and she told Aunt Chou to go to the production section and wait there. When the Youth Group had finished their day’s work, they would certainly pass by the section and she could find her own son herself.

After thanking the woman cadre, Aunt Chou found her way back to the production section. The man with spectacles was still sitting there with his head buried in a pile of files.

With frowns and a sorrowful look, Aunt Chou sat down on a bench near the window. All kinds of thoughts passed through her mind: Was it pos-

sible that her child had died of sickness? Maybe he had never been to the farm. Perhaps he was dead and they had taken his name off the list. . . . She knew her boy must have suffered quite a lot after begging for two or three years. Now she did not even know his whereabouts, whether he was dead or alive. When she felt that she had failed to take up the responsibility of a mother, her tears started to roll down her cheeks.

Right then, Little Black Horse was working in the field. He never imagined that his mother would come to see him.

That day, he and Niu Niu and Erh Hsiao-tse had joined Captain Chen's tractor team to help with the sowing. They stood on the seeder each with an iron rod in his hand and watched the funnels. If the seeds stopped passing through them, they would bang them with the iron rods to loosen the seeds. This work was so simple, so easy, so meaningless! A little fellow like Sun Hsiao-pao could also have fulfilled the task easily! That was not what they wanted to do! But, they were not disappointed. On the contrary, they were very serious and more than careful in carrying out their duty, because they had a secret plan. The success or failure of that plan depended a great deal on the young captain who was the head of the tractor team. They knew



everything had to be checked by him before it could be put into practice.

When the time came to rest, the three boys winked to one another and jumped down from the seeder. Niu Niu went to the side and brought over a jug of water they had hidden in the grass. Erh Hsiao-tse took off the enamel bowl he had tied to his waist. After filling it with water, he carefully took it over to Captain Chen, saying:

"Captain, you must be very thirsty. Have some water!"

The captain was really thirsty and after saying "thanks," took the water and finished it with one gulp.

The three boys all climbed into the driver's cabin. Little Black Horse took from his pocket a little paper bag in which were four cigarettes. He handed one to Captain Chen, saying:

"Captain, you must be very tired. Have a smoke!"

After saying "many thanks" again, the captain did not stand on ceremony with



them but put it in his mouth. Little Black Horse hurried to give him a light with the matches he had ready with him. The smoke slowly floated upward. Niu Niu immediately took out a bag and politely handed it over to the captain, saying:

"Have some sweets. These are some of the best."

"Thanks! Thanks!" The red-faced young captain took a few and replied, "Let me see if they taste good."

The three boys all kept their eyes wide open and felt very happy when they saw the captain take a sweet, remove its wrapping paper and pop it into his mouth. The first part of their plan had worked out satisfactorily. He had drunk their water, smoked their cigarettes and eaten their sweets. Previously they had had a few misgivings, thinking that this smart-looking captain might not like them to be near him because they were dirty, and they thought he might refuse any offers they made.

Niu Niu and Erh Hsiao-tse winked to Little Black Horse urging him to speak. Little Black Horse cleared his throat with a little cough and said with a smile:

"Captain, we have all been in your class. Your talks were very good!"

"Oh! Is that so?" There was a small bump on

the captain's cheek, made by the sweet that he had in his mouth.

"It's true. Captain Liu told us young people should always tell the truth. We'd never lie to you. What you have told us, we have all remembered. . . ."

"Remembered well," Erh Hsiao-tse said, following up quickly. Niu Niu did not want him to interrupt the conversation. He gave him a nudge, telling him to shut up. Little Black Horse picked up the conversation and continued:

"Really, we have remembered everything very well. Captain, you can ask us questions and test us if you don't believe us."

"Test you? All right. What is that, under my feet?"

"A starter," the three boys answered at the same time.

"This?"

"The switch."

"What's this?"

"It's the clutch pedal."

"If you step on the clutch pedal, it will go," Little Black Horse said in explanation.

"That's right. Then what do you do first when you get on the tractor?"

"First see if the switch is on or not," Niu Niu answered first.

"If the switch is off, a push upward will do," Erh

Hsiao-tse made as a supplementary remark.

"What are these two on the sides?"

Little Black Horse gave the answer immediately: "One is the head lamp and one is the tail lamp. A push upward will switch on the lights and a downward push will switch them off."

"After the engine is started, then what?"

Little Black Horse became excited and perspiration came out all over his face, but he quickly replied, "At this time the tractor has not started to move yet. Step on the clutch pedal and push the bar forward to the first gear. Slowly take your foot off the pedal. The tractor will begin to move, then push the bar to the second gear. . . ."

"When changing the gear, step on the clutch pedal first and push the bar to the second gear and then take your foot off," Niu Niu quickly recited what he remembered about the regulations.

Erh Hsiao-tse saw that they had said the important parts and, fearing that he would be considered backward, he started to add:

"If you want to go backward, push the bar to this side. Is that right?"

The red-faced captain threw another sweet into his mouth and chewed it loudly, saying:

"Quite right. I give you four points for your answers."

"Didn't we get them right? Why did you only

give us four points?" the three boys asked immediately.

"Because you all called this a 'bar.' It is not a 'bar.' It is called the gear lever. You gave me the wrong name."

"I knew long ago that was called a lever . . ."  
Little Black Horse cried out, feeling that he was unjustly discredited.

"Only I have got into the habit of calling it by this name to myself. I forgot to give it the right name."

"Although we didn't give it the right name, we know how to operate it. Now we know all the parts."

"All right, all right. Then I give you five points."

The three boys' faces were flushed with happiness. Their eyes were gleaming. Niu Niu and Erh Hsiao-tse gave Little Black Horse a slight push and winked to him, urging him to get on to the right topic quickly. Little Black Horse looked at the dignified captain and saw him putting the last sweet into his mouth. Earnest and excited, he said:

"Captain, you have given us a test, but you haven't found out if we can operate the tractor. You can sit beside us and let us show you!"

"What?" This was a great surprise to the captain who glared at them. "I sit beside you and let you drive the tractor?"

"Yes, just let us have a little try. We have seen

it done a thousand times, but we want to touch it with our own hands.”

“Only for 15 minutes!”

“Ten minutes will do!”

Captain Chen's face suddenly changed colour. With raised eyebrows, his chin down and his eyes glaring, he shouted, “No, no, not even for a second. This is state property. How can I let you play with it? That was a smart idea of yours, wasn't it? Run off, all of you. Time is already up. You'd better start work now.”

With a roar, he threw the three boys out of the cabin.

Little Black Horse and the other two felt very bad. The plan which they had worked out so beautifully and for so long, which had begun so smoothly that they had nearly succeeded, was thrown overboard in an instant. Slowly, they climbed back on to the seeder. They picked up the iron rods, sick with disappointment. As the tractor in front started to move, Erh Hsiao-tse said indignantly:

“What a cheek! He ate a lot of our sweets!”

“What a rotter! He has always looked down on us!”

“Never mind,” said Little Black Horse trying to comfort them. With confidence, he added, “You just wait. Some day we will have a chance!”

The tractor kept on humming. What a fascinating noise, yet how hateful and provoking!

At the end of the day's work, when they were about to finish, someone from the side called and said, "Hsiao Chen, you have an air-mail letter." Little Black Horse knew that the captain was in love with somebody and guessed that the letter must have come from his sweetheart. He wanted to make use of this opportunity and so he winked to Niu Niu and Erh Hsiao-tse. The three boys thought of the same thing and they secretly watched developments. They noticed that the captain hurriedly came down from the driver's cabin and wiped his dirty hands on a piece of cloth. Little Black Horse said:

"Captain, we are going to eat now!"

"All right, you can go. Come back quickly after supper. We shall have a little extra work to do."

"Yes, captain."

The three boys pretended to go to the dining-room, hand in hand and singing. After they had covered only a little distance, they turned and found that the young captain had already disappeared from sight. Little Black Horse leaped with joy. He gave both Niu Niu and Erh Hsiao-tse a jerk with his fist and smiled as he said:

"Did you notice? He didn't lock it!"

"Ha, ha, we can have a good time."

“About face!”

The three boys flew back to the fields, and they took off the hook from the seeder. They all climbed onto the tractor, and into the driver's cabin.

“No hurry,” shouted Little Black Horse. “The three of us cannot do it at the same time. One of us must be the driver and the other two will be assistants. We must work together to operate it.”

“I'll be the driver. You two can be my assistants,” Erh Hsiao-tse said.

“You won't do. You are too rough. You had better let Little Black Horse be the driver and we two can act as his assistants,” Niu Niu suggested.

Little Black Horse also felt that he would be a little more sure in handling the machine and therefore he sat in the centre of the seat with Niu Niu and Erh Hsiao-tse on either side. They were crowded but they felt very enthusiastic.

It was the first time Little Black Horse had sat on a spring seat; it was the first time he had sat face to face with a “complicated” machine. Excessive excitement made his hands tremble. Aiya, it was easier said than done; driving a real tractor was different from driving one in a dream. Little Black Horse who was supposed to be a little more experienced in handling the machine suddenly became frightened. To cover up his uneasiness and also to calm himself, he purposely



brought up a question as if he were examining his two companions.

"Now, we want to start." Then Little Black Horse asked in a serious way, "What is the first thing we should do?"

"Put the switch on. . . ."

"Just push it up, my friend."

Little Black Horse used his trembling hand to give the switch a slight push.

"Is the switch on now?"

"Yes, a little more oil," Niu Niu, who sat on his left, reminded him.

"Now you have to start the motor," Erh Hsiao-tse who was on his right also gave him a tip. "A step on the starter will make it give off a puff."

Little Black Horse carefully stepped on the starter, but there was dead silence; not a single sound came.

Strange. He stepped once again — still there was no sound.

Niu Niu and Erh Hsiao-tse said that Little Black Horse did not use enough strength. His step did not go down strongly enough. Therefore Niu Niu stretched his foot to do it and Erh Hsiao-tse also stretched his, but in the end nobody succeeded. There was still complete silence in the machine.

"Is there enough oil?" Little Black Horse asked.

"There is plenty of it. It's not a question of oil."

"Water?"

"No, it's not the water either." Erh Hsiao-tse answered.

"What is it then? Go down and have a look," Little Black Horse gave Erh Hsiao-tse this order, as if he were really the senior driver.

Erh Hsiao-tse got off to have a look at the water tank.

"There is some water there. But not much. Shall we add some?"

"All right."

Erh Hsiao-tse took up a bucket and ran off to fetch water.

Little Black Horse and Niu Niu were at a loss to know what to do. Niu Niu took out a little notebook. In it he had drawn some squares, cylinders and bars.

"This is the construction of a tractor I drew. Let's study it."

"What a mess you have drawn. How can I make it out?"

"I'll explain it to you. This is the gear lever. This is the accelerator. This is the battery. . . ."

"Wait a minute," Little Black Horse had suddenly remembered something. Very quickly, he said, "Have we connected the battery?"

"Ah! That's it! Didn't we put the switch on as soon as we got on the tractor?"

The two little devils simultaneously crawled under to take a look at the battery. The connection was really not made. This made them laugh so heartily that their eyes were nearly shut. Little Black Horse said:

"Ha, ha, something is wrong with our heads. We haven't made the connection. How could we get the current?"

"We got confused. The captain had talked about it; but we had forgotten."

The two boys connected the battery. Erh Hsiao-tse put some water into the water tank. The three boys went back to their original positions. They also added a little oil according to the proper directions and then stepped once more on the starter. The tractor suddenly let off a puff of smoke and came to life like an "iron ox," its whole body shuddering. The shaking made them dizzy.

The boys applauded.

His two assistants urged Little Black Horse on repeatedly to hurry up.

"Step on the clutch!"

"Change gear!"

The tractor commenced to move.

Little Black Horse was enthusiastic and excited but felt quite dizzy. His heart beat twice as fast and beads of perspiration which collected on the forehead trickled down to his eyebrows but he did

not mind them and had no time to wipe them off. He held the steering wheel tightly and discovered that the "iron ox" was getting naughty and was circling on the ground, refusing to go forward.

Niu Niu was angrily raising his voice, "What's wrong with this damn thing? Like a donkey circling around on a millstone?"

Erh Hsiao-tse could not keep quiet any longer and said:

"What bad luck! We've run into trouble again!"

"Erh Hsiao-tse, stop that shouting. You make me sick!" Little Black Horse frowned and said. "Niu Niu, see if we've got the gear right."

"Let's shift to the low gear and see if it is all right."

After Little Black Horse pulled the gear, the "iron ox" leaped and jumped on to the slope. This made the three boys as happy as if they were flying.

"We have learned how to drive a tractor. They can no longer bully us."

"This is not difficult to learn, after all."

"Let's drive it to the dining-room where there are many people standing around. We'll show them what we can do."

The three boys were in high spirits, feeling that they had never been happier than this. Suddenly they felt there was a sprinkling of rain. Good God,

the sky was blue without a bit of cloud. On the horizon in the west, behind the bush, there the sky was coloured by the sunset. How could it rain under such conditions? With one hand holding the steering wheel, Little Black Horse ran his other hand over his face and immediately it became black. They looked at one another and discovered they had all become "black boys."

"Apply the brake quickly," Niu Niu reminded them.

Little Black Horse pulled the lever and applied the brake. The "iron ox" finally came to a stop.

And the "sprinkling rain" also stopped.

Little Black Horse put his hand near his nose and the smell convinced him that it was lubricating oil. Where did it come from? The funny thing was, the captain had never mentioned it in his talks.

The three boys were greatly frightened, because they knew nothing about it.

Erh Hsiao-tse said without a second thought, "I don't care whether it is raining or not, puffing oil or not, let's take it to the dining-room, anyhow."

"No, that won't do. It will waste too much lubricating oil," Niu Niu protested. "We know nothing about it. If we do it wrongly, we might run into danger."

"What about it?" Little Black Horse said. "I'll just do the driving. You two look everywhere and

find out where the hell this lubricating oil is coming from. I don't believe you can't find out."

Both Niu Niu and Erh Hsiao-tse agreed. While Little Black Horse drove the tractor, Niu Niu and Erh Hsiao-tse looked everywhere. They discovered that the oiling cup was not properly covered with the lid. After putting the lid in place, the "rain" stopped.

The three children were happy again. Enthusiastically, they carefully and slowly drove the tractor towards the dining-room.

### 13. Reunion

Little Black Horse's delay in going to the dining-room caused a great deal of anxiety to Aunt Chou. As soon as the boys of the Youth Group had finished the day's work, they chatted and cracked jokes with one another, jumping and running as they came from the fields. When Aunt Chou saw them at a distance, this boy looked like her son, and that boy also looked like her son. But when they drew near, neither this one nor that one was her son. She saw that the boys were signing off from

the day's work and were happily going into the dining-room. Only she could not find the "black" boy. She was standing at the entrance to the administration office under an ash tree. She heard the singing of a group of boys who were going further and further away from her. As the evening sky was getting darker, she felt sorrowful and empty. There was no hope for her and she was extremely sad. She squatted and leaning against the tree, she burst into weeping.

"Comrade, why are you crying?"

As she lifted her head, Aunt Chou saw a young man in uniform standing in front of her. His tanned face, nicely-shaped nose and mouth convinced her that he was honest and unassuming. Aunt Chou felt a little embarrassed as she stood up with a sigh, and said:

"My son is one of the Youth Group. I haven't seen him for several years. I have come from Tientsin to see him . . . but . . . I can't find him."

"What is his name?"

"Ma Chang-sheng. He is 15 now."

"We don't have a boy called Ma Chang-sheng here," the young man answered, but after a moment he said, "we have one Ma Ping-erh, who is 15 years old."

Aunt Chou was excited at receiving this information and began to hope again. "What does this boy

look like?"

"Not very tall, thin, dark-skinned, very active, and clever. Oh, yes, on the left forehead, he has a scar. . . ."

"Yes, that's him." Aunt Chou could not control herself and cut in by saying, "He got it when he was a child. He fell on the spittoon. He has had that mark all his life."

"He also has a well-known nickname, Little Black Horse."

"Yes, that's right. Good heavens, where is he now?" Aunt Chou's eyes were gleaming now. Her breath was coming faster.

"He has gone to work in the fields with two other boys. He will be back very soon." After scrutinizing Aunt Chou, he continued, "I am the captain of the Youth Group. My name is Liu Teh-shan. Are you Little Black Horse's mother?"

"Yes, I am. There is no mistake about it." Aunt Chou felt a little surprised at the question.

"Why is it that Little Black Horse always said that he had no mother? He always said that his mother died long ago."

Aunt Chou felt a pain in her heart. Her head slowly sank down, her tears started to flow and she sobbed.

"This poor boy refuses to recognize me. Really I am not to blame. His father died. I had to take



care of two children, to feed and clothe them. How could we live? This was in the pre-liberation days, otherwise it would not have been so sad . . ." she continued.

While she wept, Aunt Chou related the whole story. Liu Teh-shan then knew why Little Black Horse had refused to admit he had a mother and why at the mention of her he was always unhappy. Liu Teh-shan felt great sympathy with the mother and son for their misfortune and he comforted Aunt Chou by saying:

"Don't think of the past. Those days are gone for ever. I will go and find Little Black Horse right now. You may stay here tonight."

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Little Black Horse and Erh Hsiao-tse drove the tractor till it arrived at the door of the dining-room. The cadres, workmen and boys of the Youth Group who had just finished supper were surprised to see the three boys driving a tractor to the dining-room. It caused a real sensation and they all threw many questions at the boys. Some praised them; some expressed amazement at what they had done. There was a great commotion.

Right then, Captain Chen of the tractor team was having his supper. He was very surprised to hear the rumbling of the tractor. Without official in-



structions, how could the tractor team take the tractor to the dining-room? The shouts and cries made him feel that something must be wrong. He put down his chopsticks and rushed out. There he saw his tractor driven by three "black" boys who were pointing out its various parts to a

big crowd of people who surrounded the machine. He lost his patience and became terribly cross. He brushed the people aside and jumping on to the tractor said indignantly:

"Why has the tractor been brought here? Who did this? Who has dared to play with my tractor?"

The three boys were so taken by surprise they remained silent. Little Black Horse was a clever boy. After thinking a moment he answered with a smile:

"The three of us did it. Captain, what do you think of our technique? What credit would you

give us for this?"

The captain became even more angry. His usually red face was getting even redder and his freckles were entirely hidden.

"Do you know how much a tractor costs? If you have ruined it, who will be responsible? You just come with me. I'll take you to the superintendent and see what he says."

"We haven't ruined anything. Don't blame us for nothing!" Niu Niu protested.

"Haven't ruined it, eh? Just look at your faces. How did you get that black oil on your faces? You have violated labour discipline and the regulations governing the safety measures for technical work. You ought to be punished for that, otherwise I am not going to be the captain of the tractor team."

The three boys were frightened now, looking at one another in amazement. At this point, Superintendent Wei happened to come along with his hands held behind his back. With a frown, he said:

"What is the trouble? Who brought the tractor to this place?"

"You ask these three little devils!" While examining to see if any part of the machine was broken, Hsiao Chen indignantly went on to say, "Without my consent and instructions, they played with the machine. If anything is out of order, we can't even buy the spare parts to replace it. That

would delay production. You tell me what I should do."

"Don't say 'if' like that. Nothing has happened to the tractor," Little Black Horse argued boldly. "If we really have spoiled something, you can punish us. But, if we have not spoiled anything, you should let us operate it again."

"The tractor is state property. You didn't buy it yourself. Why don't you let others touch it?" Erh Hsiao-tse asked in a straightforward way.

"We are no longer little devils. We have grown up," Niu Niu argued. "We also have a part in the building of socialism. Superintendent, isn't that right?"

The three "black" boys looked eagerly at the superintendent and waited for his judgement.

The superintendent looked at the boys. Through their black faces their eyes were shining. They were as clever as they were naughty. This actually made the superintendent very happy. He had never thought that these three boys were bold enough and able to drive the tractor such a great distance. Very promising boys! They could be trained to be real tractor operators. But he had to put on a stern look as he said in a serious way:

"What Captain Chen said is right. Without his permission, you can't take the tractor away. This is the regulation of our farm, you understand?"

The three boys felt that the superintendent was pouring cold water over them. With pouting lips and drooping heads, they looked very much discouraged. But the superintendent followed up by adding:

"Your enthusiasm is good and you have learned something. I see that from now on it is necessary to have a system. The master must guarantee that the pupil learns something and the pupil must make a pledge that he will learn what he is taught. If you are interested in driving the tractor, you should be allowed to do it, but only with our permission. You must have the master sit by your side and teach you how to do it. That is the safe way. What do you think?"

The three boys and those who stood by watching the dispute, especially the boys of the Youth Group, all cheered up.

"We're behind you all the way. You have our support."

"We promise to do good work and learn well."

"We want to be good tractor operators, and do something for the country!"

Hsiao Chen did not show his approval of the suggestion, but murmured to himself, "Huh! These naughty kids, not educated, not properly trained technically — how can they operate the tractor? What kind of a mess is this?"

Some of the bystanders remarked to Captain Chen, "Hsiao Chen, you can't talk that way. They are young, but they have a big heart. If they hadn't learned anything from you, they couldn't have taken the tractor all the way from the fields and brought it here. Nobody was born an operator. You have to put a little more education into their heads. These kids have the determination to contribute a bit to the building of our country and they can learn."

Little Black Horse looked around; it was the crippled Uncle Liu who was giving them this word of encouragement. Every one of them winked at him and a smile appeared on their faces.

"Comrade Hsiao Chen," Superintendent Wei said in a serious way. "We don't have enough hands in the tractor team. It looks as though later on we will have to work overtime, probably at night. It doesn't seem that we shall be given more people. The responsibility of training tractor operators will fall on your shoulders. I now entrust you with the responsibility of taking up this question. You draw up a plan. We will discuss it tomorrow."

Hsiao Chen found that nothing was damaged. Although he still had no confidence in these boys and would not trust them with the tractor, he did not show his disapproval again. And the dispute was brought to an end this way. The three boys

were very enthusiastic about it and were going to wash their hands before entering the dining-room. As they were about to walk away, Liu Teh-shan took Little Black Horse to one side and said in a low voice, "Somebody is waiting to see you outside. Go quickly!"

After gaining an upper hand in the dispute, Little Black Horse felt very cheerful and said with a smile:

"Uncle Liu, I have nobody in the world who would come to see me. Don't make fun of me!"

"Really, there is a woman. You just guess who she is!"

"I can't guess. I have neither sisters nor cousins. Also, I am not in love with anybody. Who would come to see me? Don't fool me!"

"I'm not joking. Surely, there is somebody — one of your family."

Little Black Horse affectionately embraced Liu Teh-shan's arm, leaning against him and smiling again.

"Uncle Liu," he joked, "you are my family, my most dearly loved one. I have nobody else!"

"Don't talk nonsense. You have . . . your mother. Your mother has come to see you."

Little Black Horse was stunned. He could not believe his own ears. He asked earnestly:

“Who? . . . my mother . . . she has come to see me?”

“Yes, it took her quite a long time to find you. Now she is waiting for you in front of the production section.”

Little Black Horse was obviously very excited and confused, and his heart was torn with contradictions. He stammered:

“Uncle Liu, what . . . what shall I do? Shall I see her?”

“Of course, why not?”

With tears in his eyes, he gathered enough courage to expose the secret which he had kept in his heart for such a long time. With trembling lips, he said:

“She remarried. She no longer loves me. She doesn’t want me. She is no longer my mother. . . .”

“What feudal talk! After your father’s death, she still had two kids to look after but she had no way to support them. Why shouldn’t she have married again? Whether she did remarry or not, she is still your mother. If she doesn’t love you, why do you think she would come to see you?”

“People mock me because of her remarriage. They made so much fun of me that I can’t lift up my head to face anyone.”

“That was a bad tradition of the old days. Now, you are one of the young builders of socialism. You



belong to the honoured second generation. Who dares to ridicule you? Who dares to make fun of you?"

"Then . . . I'll go now."

"Go ahead, my boy. Ask your mother to spend the night here. She can stay in our guest house."

Little Black Horse nodded. Then he started to run away.

It was getting dark. The round silver moon was slowly climbing up above the trees and stealing a glance at Little Black Horse who was running all the way along. When he came to the courtyard of the production section, he was completely out of breath. But he could not find anybody.

"Mother!" Little Black Horse cried aloud.

"Ai, I am here." Aunt Chou came out from under the ash tree. Little Black Horse threw himself into her arms, embracing her, and kept murmuring, "Mother, my mother. . . ."

With mingled sadness and joy, Aunt Chou held him tightly. Mother and son wept together, weeping in such a way that the little stars winked at them as if they were going to cry too. The round-faced moon could not bear to watch and also ran away, hiding itself behind the clouds.

As Aunt Chou sobbed she said:

"My poor boy . . . your mother has not treated you well. . . . Oh, how much you have suffered!"

Little Black Horse stopped crying. He wiped his mother's face with his dirty black hand. He tried to find words to comfort her, to make her happy.

"Don't cry, mother. Those are things of the past. Let the rotten things of the old days be thrown away. Captain Liu has helped me to understand the past. You still have old feudalistic stuff in your mind."

As soon as Aunt Chou heard this, the worry that had been in her mind for so many years was completely removed. Never since Little Black Horse ran away from home, had she had a happy day. Each time she met her only son on the street, the boy had always kept a stubborn, hostile and revengeful attitude, and turned away as if he wanted to run away from a flood or from wild animals. How long she had suffered from such mental distress! True, she had a husband at that time, but what a husband! Actually she had lived in great loneliness. Now she had everything. From the bottom of her heart she thanked the Party and the government, which by their wise and good policy had saved her degenerate husband and her unfortunate son. Moreover, the Party had saved her, a woman who formerly lived in complete hopelessness. Her heart was full of enthusiasm and happiness. Now tears of joy rolled down her face. With her cheek pressed against Little Black Horse's face,





she said, "Ai, my dear son, you have changed. Now you know a great many things."

"You have also changed, mother. You have cut off that untidy hair. You are quite different now." Little Black Horse purposely talked then of other things to relieve his mother's distress.

"Yes, every morning before I went to work, I had to spend too much time doing my hair. So I cut it off," Aunt Chou said with a happy laugh.

"What! Are you working now?" Little Black Horse asked, feeling very excited. "Where are you working?"

"I work in the clothing factory. Didn't Big-eyed Monkey tell you?"

Little Black Horse was stunned. "What do you mean by Big-eyed Monkey? Where did you see him?"

Aunt Chou became confused. "I met him in Tientsin. He told me that you were sick in the Lutai State Farm and that you needed money. . . ."

Then Little Black Horse quickly asked his mother, "Did you give him the money?"

"I did. Because your stepfather practised hoarding last year and beat me and your sister, the government sentenced him to eight months of manual labour to reform him. And good heavens! This really did reform him. The way he treats me

and your sister now is very different from before. As soon as we heard that you were in need of money, we immediately turned over ten yuan to Big-eyed Monkey which we had saved, and asked him to take it to you. Haven't you received the money?"

"That damned monkey, the black-hearted thief!" muttered Little Black Horse who was very angry to hear this. He gnashed his teeth, saying, "Mother, you were deceived by a crook. I never got any money."

## 14. Struggle

In Tientsin Smallpox Li took in two more pupils, one called Hsiao Ching and another called Hsiao Shun. Therefore, Big-eyed Monkey had two young companions.

One night, Smallpox Li sent the three boys out to the street to buy refreshments for the customers in the gambling house. When they came back, Big-eyed Monkey was the first to spot two big trucks and a motorcycle with armed soldiers parked at the entrance.

"Something's wrong!" he said in a frightened

manner and turned round. Hsiao Ching and Hsiao Shun who followed him also turned back. They were so frightened that they splashed some soup they were carrying on their clothes.

Hsiao Shun, who was the youngest of the three boys, did not understand what it was all about and asked, "Big-eyed Monkey, why did you run? The soup splashed all over me."

Big-eyed Monkey did not say anything. He entered the first lane on the street. Hsiao Ching and Hsiao Shun followed him. After several turns, they stopped.

"Too dangerous!" gasped Big-eyed Monkey who was out of breath.

"What is it all about, Big-eyed Monkey?" Hsiao Shun asked.

"You're a silly ass! They have come to search the house . . . maybe arrest us!"

"Lucky we were sent out to buy refreshments," Hsiao Ching said. "Otherwise, it would all be finished for us!"

"Then, what shall we do?" Hsiao Shun asked desperately.

"Don't worry," Big-eyed Monkey told the boy. "Let's eat now."

It was very late by this time. It was very quiet in the narrow lane and nobody was to be seen. At some distance from them there was a street lamp

but it only gave out a dim light. The three boys hid themselves in a dark corner by a wall. When they had finished eating the refreshments they had a discussion about what they should do. The weather was getting colder and they had nowhere to go to, not even a place where they could put up for the night. They talked and talked but came to no conclusion. Then Hsiao Ching said:

"I have an idea. They say that in Lutai there is a state farm, where they take in homeless children. If you go there, you can live in a new, modern house, eat fish and shrimps, and have a good life. Why don't we go there?"

Hsiao Shun agreed with what Hsiao Ching said. "They say the boys also go to school to study and the work is not heavy. Big-eyed Monkey, what do you say?"

"You can go if you want to. I ran away from that place. I'm not going back."

"Did you run away from that place? What about it? Did they give you a beating or swear at you?" Hsiao Ching immediately asked.

"No, they don't beat you, nor swear at you, but . . . you don't feel comfortable."

"Big brother Big-eyed Monkey, what do you want? If they don't beat you and don't throw mud on you, what else do you want? We have nowhere to go."



Big-eyed Monkey thought for a moment and continued, "I can't go there. When I left, I ran away with other people's things. I have a very bad reputation. If I go back, I don't know what is in store for me!"

"It doesn't matter. The Eighth Route Army men treat boys very kindly. Just go back and make an honest confession. That will do."

Hsiao Shun entreated, "Big-eyed Monkey, please promise us. You know the way. You can be our guide. You will certainly do us a favour if you go."

Surrounded and urged so earnestly by Hsiao Ching and Hsiao Shun, Big-eyed Monkey found it difficult to make up his mind. Suddenly, an idea came to him. "What a fool I am! When I stole that piece of black cloth, nobody saw me. I can say Little Black Horse took it. He is dead now. Nobody was a witness. What have I to worry about?" In this way, his mind was free of worry and the three boys were unanimous in their decision to go to the farm.

The following day, they went to the gambling house. On the door they saw two slips of paper indicating that the place had been closed on the orders of the Public Security Bureau. They dared not even linger near the place any longer. Big-eyed Monkey sold a fountain pen he had stolen and with the proceeds they bought three tickets to go to Lutai

by train. When they arrived at the farm, the sun had already set behind the mountains. Big-eyed Monkey told Hsiao Ching and Hsiao Shun to wait outside while he himself went in just to have a "look."

When he entered the gate, Big-eyed Monkey found that the old man in charge at the inquiry office was not very strict with him. He only asked Big-eyed Monkey a few questions and let him go inside.

He wandered around a little and saw there were a great many changes on the farm. On the site where there used to be debris stood rows of new, modern buildings. The roads were newly paved and smooth and on both sides were trees making a fine shade. To him it was like a new place; he could hardly recognize it now.

"It's quite a nice place for boys now. What the hell am I suffering outside for!" Big-eyed Monkey recalled the days when he was here before and compared them with what he saw and what he had suffered outside. He heard a commotion in the distance somewhere ahead of him. He did not know what was happening so he hid himself behind a big tree.

It was the day after the farm had received the new cotton-padded clothes. Superintendent Wei

and Captain Liu had gone to a meeting and were not expected back until late in the evening. Deputy Captain Kao Pao-yuan was now distributing the cotton-padded clothes to the boys in front of the production section. When the boys received the cotton-padded clothes, they laughed and shouted for joy. Suddenly, Erh Hsiao-tse discovered someone was peeping from behind the big tree. Little Black Horse was the first one to run over to see who it was. It was Big-eyed Monkey and at once he raised an alarm, crying:

“A thief, a thief!”

Big-eyed Monkey was looking with a jealous eye on the new cotton-padded clothes being issued to the boys. He never expected that he would meet Little Black Horse. When Little Black Horse made his appearance, he was quite frightened and didn't know what to do. This boy had fallen into the water, he thought, so how was it that he was not drowned? It was indeed just as the Chinese proverb says, “Enemies are bound to come across each other some day in a narrow alleyway.” Big-eyed Monkey could not think of any better thing to do and so he turned and took to his heels. Little Black Horse rushed upon him, Big-eyed Monkey stuck out a leg tripping Little Black Horse who fell to the ground. Then Big-eyed Monkey went on running. Led by

Kao Pao-yuan, a group of boys were hot in pursuit and after covering a short distance they caught him and dragged him back.

A struggle ensued.

The most enthusiastic boy who took part in this struggle was, of course, Little Black Horse who recalled all the bad things done by Big-eyed Monkey. He was burning with anger and his eyes were as bright as two fires. Stamping his feet on the ground, he shouted:

"Big-eyed Monkey, you're a real smart one! I was going to reckon with you one day but now you have come yourself. Answer my first question: Did you steal Captain Kao's cloth?"

Big-eyed Monkey hung his head. His threadbare cotton-padded coat was now torn to pieces after all the fighting and dragging around by the boys. One of the sleeves had come right off and there was nothing much of the front or the back still left on him. He kept blink-



ing his eyes and looked at Little Black Horse, not daring to admit nor to deny the theft.

"I will beat you if you don't speak up!" Little Black Horse yelled, rushing up to him and taking him by the collar. He gave Big-eyed Monkey a push and sent him flying to the ground. Kao Pao-yuan stood nearby, doing nothing. He had bought that cloth for his mother. When he was ready to send it away, he found it had been stolen, and it had made him very cross. He shouted:

"Did you steal my cloth? You had better tell me. You can't get away with it."

"Yes, I did," Big-eyed Monkey confessed.

"You . . . you good-for-nothing!" Little Black Horse yelled again indignantly waving his fists. "Why did you ask me to run away with you? Why did you cheat my mother of her money? Speak!"

Big-eyed Monkey now supported himself with one arm on the ground. He felt he had better say nothing, but only bow his head. Erh Hsiao-tse took his chin and forced him to lift up his head. He questioned him, saying:

"You cheated me of my money. Give it back to me!"

All the other children shouted:

"And mine, too!"

"And mine, too!"

"You and your dirty tricks!"

"You still want to come and steal our things!"

"You want to steal our new cotton-padded clothes!"

"You can't say that about me!" Big-eyed Monkey yelled back, struggling to his feet. "I didn't come to steal your things. I come to see whether I could work on the farm again."

"Why, then," Niu Niu asked, "did you act stealthily like a thief, if you just wanted to join us again?"

"I didn't act like a thief. I just stood behind the tree for a while. Little Black Horse said I was a thief."

"Don't you call it being a thief when you run away with other people's things? Isn't that being a thief?"

"If you were not a thief, why did you run away?"

"He doesn't want to listen to reason. Let's give him a good beating."

"Yes, let's beat him!"

"If we don't beat him, he won't speak up."

"Beat him! Beat him!"

Who started it first, nobody knew, but the indignant boys all fell upon Big-eyed Monkey with angry fists and kicks. In a few minutes, he fell down on the ground with a black eye and a swollen nose. Kao Pao-yuan was afraid that the boys might hurt him too much and so he stopped them, saying:

"Stop, everybody. Comrades, let's tie him up and let the superintendent deal with this boy when he comes back. All right?"

"Good!" the boys shouted. They quickly found some cord and in a few minutes they had tied Big-eyed Monkey to a tree. There they left him.

At dusk, when the superintendent and Liu Teh-shan came back, Kao Pao-yuan went to the superintendent's office and made a report about the arrest of Big-eyed Monkey. Superintendent Wei was smoking, as he walked up and down in his office with his hands behind his back. He did not speak for a long time. Liu Teh-shan could not keep silent any longer so he broke in by saying:

"Lao Kao, this is a bad state of affairs. I don't think it was right to have given him a good hiding without questioning him further.

"I asked him. He admitted stealing the cloth."

"But that's even more reason why we shouldn't have given him a hiding at all."

"Well! The boys did it. I didn't touch him."

"You didn't take part, but you are responsible for it. The boys should have listened to you — they were under your leadership."

"He's a thief. What difference does it make? We don't have to worry about it," Kao Pao-yuan said, in a rather dissatisfied way.

"We have no right to beat a man, Comrade Kao Pao-yuan," Liu Teh-shan said coldly, frowning at his comrade. "This bad reception will create very hostile reactions in him. It won't help to educate him at all. We won't achieve our aim by doing this kind of thing! Do you understand?"

"Don't let us quarrel any more," Superintendent Wei said. "We have to get everything clear now, Comrade Lao Kao. Please bring Big-eyed Monkey here. I want to talk to him personally."

Kao Pao-yuan left the office and walked away.

When he arrived at the courtyard of the production section, the moonlight was nearly as bright as day, making things easy to see all over the place. Where was Big-eyed Monkey? He made use of his flashlight, but under the big tree there was only a roll of cord on the ground. Big-eyed Monkey had run away!

This gave Kao Pao-yuan a surprise; he turned and immediately headed for the front gate.

It was because the boys did not know how to bind a man; although they had put the cord around him many, many times, they had not tied him firmly enough. When it was dark and Big-eyed Monkey saw that everybody had gone, he had loosened the cord with both hands, and slowly managed to untie it. Like a rat, the boy had crept along in the shadow of the wall.



As he went along, suddenly he had heard someone talking inside a house. It was the voice of Little Black Horse:

"Big-eyed Monkey always throws mud on other people. Today, he is in trouble and he deserves it."

Big-eyed Monkey stood up straight and looked into the room and saw that there was only Little Black Horse with his mother. Little Black Horse was smiling, sitting on his bed and helping his mother wind some wool into a ball. Big-eyed Monkey thought that the beating he had received earlier in the day was due to Little Black Horse who had incited all the boys to kick and beat him. He said to himself, "You are enjoying yourself here, but I will let you taste this." He aimed a small stone he had picked up from the ground at Little Black Horse and threw it in through the window. As soon as he heard a cry inside, he took to his heels and ran away as fast as his two legs would carry him.

The stone did not hit Little Black Horse, but it overturned the kerosene lamp on the table. The lamp was made of a bottle full of kerosene which, when the lamp was overturned, splashed all over the table. The pile of cards and account books together with the children's story books which were on the table caught fire. Instantly flames and smoke seemed to billow around Little Black Horse who in such desperate haste could not find anything

to fight the fire. He picked up the broom with which he used to sweep the *kang* and kept beating the flames with it. He shouted:

“Mother, bring some water quickly!”

Aunt Chou was terribly frightened. She looked for a wash basin, but not seeing one, she just went round and round the room, unable to find anything else.

The flames leaped higher and higher. The bed sheet and blanket were splashed with kerosene and they also caught fire. The broom which Little Black Horse held also caught fire and all that was left of it was the handle. The room was now full of smoke. Little Black Horse shouted:

“Mother, go out quickly and call for help!”

Aunt Chou could not open her eyes because of the smoke. She ran around and bumped against this and that, and finally she found her way out. She raised her voice and cried out:

“Help, help . . . fire!”

Little Black Horse was in a terrible state. He managed to put out the fire on the table, but then the bed caught fire. He was the only one in the room. What should he do? Then an idea came to him. In great haste he opened the window and threw the burning blanket, bed sheet and the straw mattress outside thinking that there was nothing there and that there was no fear of anything else

catching fire. He had burns on his face, his hands and several other places on his body but he did not mind them.

It seemed as though the danger was over. But suddenly there was an explosion. By the corner of the wall, there was half a can of petrol, which immediately caught fire sending a column of bright flames up to the wooden beams of the house. Tongues of red flame licked the beams and the eaves.

"Oh, hell! I forgot that half a can of petrol." Little Black Horse suddenly thought of the next place — the "mysterious house" next door — in which the tractor, seeders, harvesting and other machinery were kept. . . . If that house caught fire, all the machines would be destroyed. He knew immediately what he must do.

"These are the most precious things on the farm — the life line. That house must not catch fire. . . ."

Compelled by the emergency, he took off his cotton-padded coat and regardless of what would happen to him rushed to the can of burning petrol. He spread his coat over it and pressed it down with his body.

Aunt Chou's cry for help attracted many people. Someone went quickly to ring the fire-alarm.

"Ding, dong, ding, dong. . . ."

In the still night, this noise alarmed everyone.

When Liu Teh-shan arrived at the warehouse with the boys of the Youth Group, the straw mattress and blanket were still burning right in front of the window. Clouds of black smoke came out from the window and were blowing up to the sky. Aunt Chou ran frantically among the flames not even covering her hair, which spread out around her shoulders. She took Liu Teh-shan by the arm, and asked excitedly:

"Captain, captain, my son . . . he is still inside!"

The captain had no time to talk to her. He went with the boys right into the smoke-filled room.

The fire in the house was not big. Only a bundle of hemp on the floor by the bed had caught fire. The corner of the table was on fire and still burning. Some books and clothing scattered on the ground were also on fire and half burned. There was also a bed cover on the floor which was smoking badly. A pillow which had been stepped over many times and torn had its contents scattered all over the place. The boys all brought water which they poured over the burning articles.

"Where is my son?" Aunt Chou shouted loudly, not seeing Little Black Horse, her voice becoming hoarse from so much shouting.

Someone groaned.

Liu Teh-shan switched on his flashlight and after turning it towards the dark corner by the outer wall

discovered Little Black Horse lying across his burning cotton-padded jacket which covered the can of petrol, his head and arms lying motionless. Aunt Chou rushed over and caught him. The cotton-padded coat that covered and was pressed down over the can was burning in many places; and Little Black Horse's face and chest were badly burned. It was evident to everybody that his heroic action had saved many valuable machines in the next room from destruction and had prevented the farm from suffering a great loss. They were all greatly upset. Aunt Chou did not realize why he had done this. Instead, she felt sorry and shed tears for her son's burns. She said:

"How foolish he was! Why did he throw his body on the fire?"

"Aunt Chou, don't talk like that. Your child is a clever, courageous and politically conscious boy," Liu Teh-shan said in his excitement. "You should feel honoured to have a son like him. We feel proud of having a boy like this on our farm. Come on, boys, take off that door and let's carry Little Black Horse to the clinic. He must have his burns cared for as quickly as possible."

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After Liu Teh-shan had made all the arrangements for the care of Little Black Horse, he went to

the superintendent's office. Many people had gathered at the door of the office. The boys of the Youth Group each fought for the first chance to tell about Big-eyed Monkey.

"Big-eyed Monkey ran away but he has been caught again."

"He got to the gate, but didn't know it was locked. He asked the old man at the inquiry office for the key to open it, and the old man refused to give it to him. . . ."

"The old man heard the alarm. Of course, he refused to open the gate for him. . . ."

"They said he started the fire. . . ."

Liu Teh-shan walked into the superintendent's office and saw Niu Niu and Erh Hsiao-tse holding Big-eyed Monkey by the arms. Big-eyed Monkey was shivering with fright and Kao Pao-yuan was angrily shouting at him:

"Now answer me honestly. Was it you who started the fire?"

Big-eyed Monkey who was dirty and bruised all over really looked like a monkey now. He looked extremely miserable and completely wretched as he whined:

"Captain Kao, I really didn't do it. I hate Little Black Horse. When I saw him through the window, I picked up a stone and threw it at him. I didn't know whether it hit him or not. I never set

fire to anything. . . . I wouldn't dare to do that."

"You still deny it? I know you won't admit it, unless you are sent to the Public Security Bureau."

Big-eyed Monkey was very much afraid of being turned over to the Public Security Bureau. On his dirty face were two lines of tears. When he heard this, he quickly bent down and kowtowed to all those in the office, saying:

"Superintendent Wei, Captain Liu, and Captain Kao, pray believe me. I came to the farm to find work. I have brought two other boys who want to join the farm. They are still waiting outside the gate. If you don't believe this, you can tell them to come in and ask them. From now on, I have decided to go straight and become a new man. I will not steal and beat other people any more. Please forgive me. Give me a chance!"

Superintendent Wei told him to get up. Niu Niu and Erh Hsiao-tse tried hard to pull him up, but he still knelt down before them.

Superintendent Wei left the room for a moment to exchange opinions with Liu Teh-shan. When he came back he said to Niu Niu and Erh Hsiao-tse:

"You two take him outside the gate and see if there are two children waiting for him. Bring them all in if they are there."

After their departure, Liu Teh-shan made a report about the fire on the basis of what Aunt Chou

had told him. As a result of their analysis, they considered that what Big-eyed Monkey had said could be accepted as the truth. When they discussed the question of how to deal with Big-eyed Monkey, Kao Pao-yuan suggested that he be turned over to the Public Security Bureau so that he would get severe punishment according to the law. This way they could save the farm a lot of trouble and the cadres would not have to worry about him. Liu Teh-shan was of the opinion that Big-eyed Monkey should be kept on the farm and be given another chance to reform himself through labour, because he himself had expressed his willingness to repent. Liu Teh-shan then added that ideological remoulding was very difficult and delicate and that it was not right to be afraid of the difficulties. He went on to say that if they were patient and showed a kindly attitude to help Big-eyed Monkey recognize his own faults immediately after returning to the farm, it would probably not have posed such a problem after all.

At the height of a hot debate between the two captains, Big-eyed Monkey brought in the two boys, Hsiao Ching and Hsiao Shun, and the superintendent then had a talk with these two boys who confirmed the fact that they and Big-eyed Monkey had come to join the farm. The superintendent decided to keep the three boys. As Big-eyed Mon-



key had committed an offence and violated the regulations, he was given two weeks' confinement. The superintendent said that leniency should be integrated with punishment and that punishment itself must be educational.

Two weeks later, Big-eyed Monkey joined the Youth Group to begin work. Little Black Horse's burns were also healed. His love for the farm and the country, and his selfless and heroic actions were mentioned in bulletins and won him merit. He was respected and liked by all his comrades. During the period of his convalescence, the superintendent, cadres, and all the boys showed their concern for his health and came to see him regularly. After pay day, Captain Chen of the tractor team made a special trip to Lutai and bought two catties of big apples and a packet of sweets for him. When he went to see Little Black Horse, Captain Liu, Niu Niu and Erh Hsiao-tse who went first were helping him walk to the courtyard to enjoy the sunshine.

"You are indeed a brave lad. When you're fully recovered, I will teach you all I know and I'll certainly train you to be a good tractor operator. Oh! . . ." Suddenly he thought of something and then added, "I will take the initiative this time and teach you without any obligation on your part either to flatter me or to treat me to sweets or cigarettes. Does that sound all right?"

Out in the yard, in the bright warm sunshine, Little Black Horse's bandaged face was full of smiles. Sitting by his side were Niu Niu, Erh Hsiao-tse and Uncle Liu Teh-shan who also laughed heartily with him.

What took place afterwards has already been mentioned in the opening paragraph of the first chapter. Little Black Horse, Niu Niu, Erh Hsiao-tse and Big-eyed Monkey as well as the other boys have now made the farm their home. Under the tender, loving care of the Party and the government, they work industriously, learn enthusiastically and live happily. Who could tell now that in the past they were "beggars" and "petty thieves"? That sad, unfortunate and shameful life only remains in their memory like a scar. With the development of their motherland, they too are growing bigger and stronger and becoming finer people.



